

S U M M A R Y O F C O N T E N T S

O F

T H E S I S.

TITLE:

GEORGE MEREDITH:

A Survey and Selection of Contemporary Periodical Reviews
and Criticisms of his Poetry.

Submitted for the Degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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S U M M A R Y.

INTRODUCTION.

1. Brief Introductory remarks showing that Meredith is an interesting study both as a man of unusual personality and as a writer. He belongs chronologically to the Victorian Age, but differs in outlook from the other great writers of his time.

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1 - 4.

2. Outline of Meredith's Life and Work: 1828 - 1909, and the Reception of his Poetry by the Critics.

Twelve volumes of poetry published during his lifetime. The main events of his personal life and his literary career are traced and an attempt is made to place the writing and publication of his various volumes in the correct biographical context. Meredith was also a great and prolific novelist, and the writing of the ~~new~~ novels delayed and interrupted his poetic work.

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5 - 21.

3. A Survey and Analysis of Critical Estimates of Meredith's Poetry, expressed in Contemporary Periodical Reviews.

All available reviews were read and analysed, and in this chapter a comprehensive and synthesised account is given, of the various critical opinions and attitudes. These main points may be briefly summarised as follows:

Because of his difficulty Meredith was limited in his appeal, and did not secure widespread popularity, but he had a devoted band of admirers of his poetry throughout his literary career.

His Nature Poetry struck a new note and was much admired because of the poet's intense love of beauty and his accuracy of observation. His attitude to Nature was a combination of Pantheism with the scientific Theory

of Evolution.

Man in Meredith's view is a part of Nature, and he can only realise his powers to their fullest by obeying the natural laws of Earth. Meredith had a thorough insight into the human heart, and understood human motives. Life was "good in essence" to Meredith, and his wholesome optimism was much admired.

Meredith's system of morality was based on a code of ethics, not on religion, but the critics found it on the whole to be sane and healthy. "Modern Love" however offended many by its indelicate outspokenness.

He was original in his ideas and unconventional and progressive in outlook.

Meredith had an amazing and admirable power of intellect, but this led to the obscurity and difficulty of his poetry. He made no attempt to render difficult ideas comprehensible to his readers, so that the unintelligibility of his verse came to be regarded as an essential "Meredithian" quality.

Because of his interest in the ideas and the subject-matter rather than the melody of his verse, he neglected form and expression, and the result is faulty inharmonious rhythm.

Keats, Tennyson and Browning are selected by the critics as the poets who had most influence on Meredith's choice and treatment of subject in his poetry.

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A SELECTION OF CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS AND CRITICISMS:

The following articles are reproduced verbatim. Brief editorial and explanatory notes are added at the head of the articles wherever these seemed necessary. Those reviews were chosen which were judged to be the most interesting or the most representative of the general critical opinion.

"Poems", 1851.

- The Spectator, July 5, 1851, pp. 642.
 The Athenaeum, August 23, 1851, p. 395.
 The Critic, Nov. 15, 1851, pp. 539-40, by W.M. Rossetti.
 Fraser's Magazine, Dec., 1851, pp. 629-31, by Charles Kingsley

"Modern Love, and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads."

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- The Spectator, May 24, 1862, pp. 580-1.
 and reply by A.C. Swinburne, June 7, 1862, pp. 632-3
 The Athenaeum, May 31, 1862, pp. 719-20.
 The Morning Post, June 20, 1862, p. 6, by Captain Frederick Maxse.
 The Westminster Review, July 1862, p. 284.
 The Saturday Review, October 24, 1863, pp. 562-3.

"Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth".

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- The Times, June 11, 1883, p.4.
 The Athenaeum, July 28, 1883, pp. 103-4 by Theodore Watts-Dunton.
 The Academy, July 21, 1883, pp. 37-38, by Mark Pattison.
 Merry England, August, 1883, pp. 316-8 by A.M.
 The Glasgow Herald, Aug. 7, 1883, p.3 and Aug. 14, p.3, by Moncure D. Conway.
 The Contemporary Review, Sept., 1883, pp. 465-6 by W.P. Ker.
 The Fortnightly Review, Nov., 1883, pp. 717-8 by W.L. Courtney.
 The Annual Register for 1883, part (ii), pp. 78-9.

"Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life".

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- The Academy, June 11, 1887, p. 406, by J.M. Gray.
 The Athenaeum, June 11, 1887, p. 759 by W.E. Henley.
 The Saturday Review, June 11, 1887, p. 851 by W.E. Henley.
 Progress, July, 1887, pp. 218-21 by Philip Sidney (G.W. Foote).

"A Reading of Earth".

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- The Atlantic Monthly: Vol. LXI, Feb. 1888, pp. 178-93, by George Parsons Lathrop.
 The Scottish Art Review, Feb. 1889, pp. 263-5, by Wm. Sharp.
 The National Reformer, Feb. 24, 1889 pp. 116-7, by G.W. Foote.

"Poems: The Empty Purse, with Odes to the Comic Spirit, to Youth in Memory, and Verses."

and

"Jump-to-Glory Jane."

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- The Daily Chronicle, October 29, 1892, p.3.
 The Saturday Review, Dec. 17, 1892, pp. 718-20.
 The English Illustrated Magazine, Sept, 1893, pp. 900-8,
 by A.T. Quiller-Couch.
 The Times, Oct. 27, 1892, p.12.

"Selected Poems"

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- The Academy, Oct. 2, 1897, pp. 253-4.
The Saturday Review, Oct. 9, 1897, pp. 393-5.
The Athenaeum, Oct. 23 1897, p.560.
The Bookman, Nov. 1897, p.44 by A.M.
The Literary World, Nov.5, 1897, p.360.
The Times, Nov. 5, 1897, p.13.
May 31, 1898, p.6.
The Illustrated London News, June 18, 1898, p.896 by C.K. Shorter.

"Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History." 186

- The Academy, March 12, 1898, p.293, by Francis Thompson.
April 9, 1898, p.3.
The Spectator, October 29, 1898, p.609.
The Saturday Review, Nov. 12 1898, pp. 644-5.
The Times, Nov. 12, 1898, p.10
Literature, Nov.26, 1898, pp.485-6.
Sept. 30, 1899, pp.322-3, by E.W.
The Bookman, Dec. 1898, pp. 78-9, by A.M.
The Athenaeum, Dec. 22, 1898, p.885.

"The Nature Poems".

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- The Times, Aug. 4, 1898, p.12.
The Athenaeum, Nov. 5, 1898, p.647..
Literature, Nov.19, 1898, p.463.
The Saturday Review, Nov. 2, 1907, p.550.
The Bookman, Jan. 1908, p. 183.
The Athenaeum, Jan. 4, 1908, p. 20.

"A Reading of Life, with Other Poems."

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- Literature, June 15, 1901, pp. 517-8.
The Academy, June 29, 1901, pp. 547-8.
July 6, 1901, p.18; letter from H.P.Wright.
The Fortnightly Review, July 1901, pp. 159-61, by Stephen Gwynn.
The Saturday Review, July 13, 1901, pp. 49-50, by Arthur Symons.
The Athenaeum, July 20, 1901, pp.81-2.
The Monthly Review, Oct. 1901, pp. 20-21.

"Last Poems".

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- The Times Literary Supplement, Oct. 21, 1909, p.381.
Country Life, Oct 23, 1909, p.572.
The Bookman, Nov., 1909, p.94, by Arthur Waugh.
The Athenaeum, Nov. 6, 1909, p.551.
The Saturday Review, Nov. 13, 1909, supplement IV-V.
The Spectator, Nov. 20, 1909, p.849.
The Literary World, Dec. 15, 1909, p.387.
The Cape Times, Feb. 1, 1910, p.6.
The Forum, New York, April, 1910, pp.441-7 by Richard le Gallienne.

"Poems Written in Early Youth; Poems from 'Modern Love',
and Scattered Poems."

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The Nation, Feb. 19, 1910, pp. 814-5.
 Truth, Feb. 23, 1910, p.458 by Desmond b. O'Brien.
 The Times Literary Supplement, Feb. 24, 1910, p.63.
 The Bookman, March 1910, pp. 274-5 by M. Sturge Henderson.
 The Athenaeum, March 5, 1910, pp.270-1.
 The Saturday Review, March 12, 1910, pp. 334-5.

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"The Poetical Works."

The Athenaeum, Oct. 26, 1912, p.474.
 The Cape Times, Nov. 22, 1912, p.11.
 The Nation, Nov. 23, 1912, pp.359-60.
 The Spectator Literary Supplement, Dec. 7, 1912, pp. 931-2.

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P R E F A C E.

Now that many of those writers who ten years ago were dismissed as "those impossible Victorians" are enjoying a well-merited return to popularity, the time is perhaps favourable for presenting this thesis on Meredith. I have always admired his work, and this survey of the valuations of his poetry by his contemporaries has been an absorbing and most interesting study.

I am indebted chiefly to Professor O. Doughty, Arderne Professor of English Literature at the University of Cape Town, who guided this work through its many vicissitudes. Much of the worth which it might have is I am sure attributable to his valuable advice and criticism.

The staff of The South African Public Library, of the Library of the University of Cape Town, and of the British Museum, were of great assistance in tracing and procuring much of the material which I required; I much appreciated their courtesy and helpfulness.

I wish to express my gratitude to my friend, Miss Sheila Hood, for the time and care bestowed on the typing of this thesis. Finally, I am grateful also to all those friends who encouraged me to complete what proved to be a very exacting and arduous undertaking.

IDA E. HART.

Cape Town,
September, 1948.

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conversationalist. Flora Shaw,¹ who met him in 1887, said that conversation with Meredith was something in the nature of a Socratic dialogue, "slight and tentative remark on one side serving only to mark the paragraphs of full discourse upon the other." Meredith was not amenable to persuasion, and in his personal views and convictions was excessively dogmatic. Anyone who was foolhardy enough to voice an opinion which conflicted with his was subjected to a brilliant monologue, delivered with all the compelling force of the poet's deeply resonant voice, during the course of which the listener found his previous convictions being swept away on the flood of eloquence, and he himself reduced to a state of respectful submission.

In appearance Meredith was striking and attractive: "A lithe athletic body, loosely turned out in a flannel shirt, knickerbockers, stout boots, the whole completed by a wide-awake and a scarlet flowing tie; a memorably handsome and sensitive face,....curly red-gold hair, beard and moustache; a vehement compelling personality."² D.G.Rossetti found so much sensitive nobility in his face, that he used Meredith's profile as the model for the "Christ" of his painting "Saint Mary Magdalene". Age added dignity but did nothing to dim his handsomeness. In 1888, when Meredith was sixty, William Fullerton, the Boston journalist, paid him a visit at Box-Hill, and has described him for us: "Iron-grey hair with ripples in it,.....A bright eye, a straight nose, a compact, lithe, broad-shouldered figure, a person with fine breeziness in all his movements, and a strong step upon the earth without a touch of uncertainty in it.....I was immediately impressed with the splendidly healthy tone and superabundant life of the man."³

George was an only child, a proud and lonely little boy; he lost his mother while he was still very young, and his father who

1 New Princeton Review, March, 1887. (quoted in Hammerton's "George Meredith" p.58)

2 J.B.Priestly: "George Meredith", Chapter 1. (1926)

3 Boston Advertiser, Dec. 17, 1888, by W.M.F. (William Morton Fullerton)

soon married again and was not interested in him. His parents were of mixed Irish and Welsh extraction; and the boy was educated in Germany. These facts alone will suggest to the psychologist a possible explanation of Meredith's eccentric and individualistic temperament. It seems that from the conflicting strands of his inheritance and his early life he was unable to weave an intelligible and convincing pattern. He was married twice; first, at twenty-one, most unhappily, to a woman almost ten years his senior, and then, at thirty-four, to a woman of French extraction ten years younger than himself. There is a suggestion of neurosis in the underlying tone of many of his letters to his friends, and even when expressing ardent affection they seem curiously to lack warmth and friendliness. Even at its warmest his personal poetry, like his letters, has a certain frigid diffidence, a "shut-in" quality which keeps us at a distance: he does not want us to probe too deeply beneath his armour or to see too closely into his heart. We admire and appreciate Meredith, we are exalted by him, but we cannot love him because he is not lovable. And yet Meredith, the writer and thinker, in his later years became a cult. His views on all matters of moment were eagerly sought, and pilgrimages were made to the great seer, living aloof at Box-Hill, by people who knew little of his work. The complete and authentic psychological study of Meredith's writings and personality should prove of absorbing interest.

As a great novelist and thinker, and as a man of arresting presence and strong personality, he won the appreciation and admiration of his contemporaries. Even Carlyle, dour and non-committal as he was, is said to have declared that "that young man's nae fule."¹ But George Meredith was also a poet: he, in fact, regarded poetry as the fitting vehicle for his genius. In 1851 he commenced his literary career with a volume of "Poems", and in the last years of his life devoted himself almost exclusively to poetry; he turned to novel-writing only because he was in dire need of pecuniary "pot-boilers". It is the irony of fate that Meredith was acknowledged,

1 Letter from York Powell to Professor Elton, 1896.

(quoted in Hammerton's "George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism".

by contemporary critics, to be a great and original novelist, whereas his right to claim even the name of "poet" was disputed.

The present survey makes no attempt to give a study of his personality, nor is it an analysis and estimate of his work. Both these interesting subjects may receive some incidental illumination, but the intention of the selection and study of contemporary criticisms here presented, is to trace the development of Meredith's reputation as poet. Many of the reviews are anonymous, but are valuable as being representative of the attitudes of the reading public towards his work.

OUTLINE OF MEREDITH'S LIFE AND WORK: 1828 - 1909,
and the Reception of his Poetry by the Critics.

In this chapter I propose to present a brief study of the biographical context of the publication of Meredith's various volumes of poems, and at the same time to indicate the general critical attitude of the reviewers.

George Meredith was born at Portsmouth on February 12, 1828. He was the only child of Augustus Armstrong Meredith, a naval outfitter of that town. George's grandfather was Melchizedek Meredith (immortalised as The Great Mel of Evan Harrington), a remarkable and striking personality who conducted his business in the grand manner and was on terms of friendship with many men of aristocratic birth among his clientele. Under the management of his son Augustus, a far less impressive figure than Melchizedek, the business became less prosperous. Augustus was of Welsh extraction and his wife Anglo-Irish; their son therefore could quite justly claim to have inherited Celtic blood and a Celtic temperament. His mother died when he was five, and when his father married again George became a ward in chancery. Already the boy seemed to isolate himself from normal contacts with his fellows. All his life Meredith, probably under the pressure of Victorian middle-class snobbery, was ashamed of the fact that his father had been connected with trade and refused to identify himself with the comparatively humble status of the tradesman class. On the other hand, he had no claim to aristocratic standing; so that he found himself in the unenviable position of falling between two worlds. Young Meredith was a handsome sensitive boy, and finding that he held himself aloof, the other boys of the town dubbed him "Gentleman George" and left him to go his own way; with no friends of his own age, motherless, and out of sympathy with his father, it was inevitable that he should become introspective and remote.

At first Meredith attended St. Paul's Church School, Southsea; then in 1842, when he was fourteen, he went for two years to the Moravian School at Nieuwied on the Rhine. These are formative years

in the life of a boy, and the spirit of gentle tolerance at the school must have done much to strengthen his ability to take a sympathetic view of life as a whole. It probably explains also why Meredith, unlike most of the other great Victorian writers, is almost free from the provincialism and conventional prejudices of his age.

When he returned from Germany he went to London, and for a time he seems to have considered the law as a career. In February, 1846 he was articled to a Mr. Charnock, a somewhat eccentric solicitor with literary tastes. Charnock introduced him to Ned Peacock, the son of Thomas Love Peacock, author, and friend of Shelley, and encouraged a group of his young friends to form a literary circle. They privately produced a manuscript paper called "The Monthly Observer", one of the members of the circle each month acting as editor and critic of the contributions submitted by the others. Apart from several translations from German poetry, Meredith's first contribution was "St. Theresa", a poem of four eight-line stanzas, in January, 1849. After this several other poems were accepted by various periodicals, and Meredith was regarded by his friends as a promising young writer. Encouraged by their good wishes he ventured into print in 1851 with a slender volume of "Poems", bound appropriately between "grass-green" covers. A letter to his publisher, Charles Ollier, expressed his modest ambition: "They will serve their purpose in making known my name to those who look with encouragement upon such earnest students of nature who are prepared to persevere until they obtain the wisdom and inspiration and self-possession of the poet."¹ He was prepared, he stated, to be greeted with "injustice and slight";¹ but it is gratifying that many readers, and some of the critics, were charmed by the youthful freshness, sincerity, and sweetness of these early poems.

The 1851 volume was dedicated to Thomas Love Peacock, whose daughter Mary Ellen Nicholls, a beautiful widow of thirty, Meredith had married in 1849. Mary was romantic and talented, but after the

¹ Letter from Meredith to Charles Ollier, 1851 (quoted in J. A. Hammerton's "George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism", p. 8)

first glow of happiness had passed the marriage was to prove a dismal failure. The Merediths had neither settled income nor home and this probably increased the friction. "Two highly strung temperaments - man and wife - each imaginative, emotional, quick to anger, cuttngly satirical in dispute, each an incomparable wielder of the rapier of ridicule, could not find domestic content within the narrow bounds of poverty and lodgings."^{* 1} A son Arthur had been born to them in 1853, but even he could not bridge the rift which had opened between husband and wife. In 1858 Mary Meredith eloped to Capri with the artist Henry Wallis, deserting her husband and small son, and though she later returned to England, no reconciliation took place. She died in October, 1861, and Meredith did not even know of her death until some days later.

In the midst of unhappiness such as this there could be little urge to poetry. "Poems" of 1851 was but "the vanguard of a better work to come",^{* 2} Meredith had promised, but it was eleven years before he published his next volume of verse. Biographical information concerning this period is not very explicit, but it is evident that Meredith was facing considerable difficulties, financial as well as domestic. We know that during this period, in spite of his decidedly liberal sentiments, he became editor of a Tory paper, the Ipswich Journal, and between 1859 and 1866 he was correspondent to the Morning Post. Such work could never at any time of his life have been congenial to Meredith, so ~~that~~ we must conclude that he was forced to these tasks by financial necessity. His letters at the time confirm this view: "In the matter of verse, I shall rarely be able to give my time for the money I get for it."^{* 3} and again, "It is true that I have fallen from what I once hoped to do. The fault is hardly mine. Do you know Vexation, the slayer? There is very little poetry to be done when one is severely and incessantly harassed. My nerves have given way under it...."^{* 4}

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- ^{* 1} Letters of George Meredith, Vol. 1, p.7 of Introduction by his son W. M. Meredith.
- ^{* 2} Letter from Meredith to Charles Ollier, 1851 (quoted in J.A. Hammerton's "George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism", p.8)
- ^{* 3} Letters of George Meredith, p.22 to S. Lucas, editor of "Once a Week", 1860
- ^{* 4} Letters of George Meredith, p.44 : Nov. 13, 1861, to Rev. Augustus Jessop.

Apart from journalism Meredith had been hard at work at his novels. "The Shaving of Shagpat" appeared in 1855, "Farina" in 1857, "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel" in 1859 and "Evan Harrington" in 1861. Although never at any stage of his career could Meredith have been called a popular author, yet among the critics he had established a reputation as an original and brilliant writer, and a young novelist of great promise.

He had moreover a circle of fervent admirers of his poetry, who ranked him next to Tennyson, and were urging him to publish a second volume of verse. Accordingly, on 3rd May, 1862, Meredith published "Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads", affectionately dedicated to his friend Admiral (then Captain) Frederick Maxse.^{x1} Meredith was writing in an age of squeamishness, and by his outspokenness had earned the disfavour of the self-appointed guardians of the Morals of Youth: "My literary reputation," he wrote in one of his letters, "is tabooed as worse than libertine in certain virtuous societies."^{x2} He realised that his then daring choice of subject in Modern Love, that of a married woman, her husband and her lover, would meet with great ^{approval} ~~disfavour~~, so on the fly-leaf of the poem appeared the caustic taunt:

"This is not meat
for little people or for fools."

This was certainly, with a vengeance, flourishing a whip for their scourging before his critics; and in return he brought upon himself the slings and arrows of the reviewers. The "morbid theme" of Modern Love offended the delicacy and reticences of the Victorian Age; "He sometimes treats serious themes," wrote the Spectator critic, "with a flippant levity that is exceedingly vulgar and unpleasant."^{x3}

The reception of the book was not entirely hostile, however, and those who rallied to his defence were as eloquent and as powerful

^{x1} Reviewer of Modern Love in The Morning Post, June 20, 1862.

^{x2} Letters of George Meredith, P. 59 : Dec. 20, 1861 to Rev. Augustus Jessop.

^{x3} The Spectator : 24 May, 1862 pp. 580-581.

as those who gathered to rend him. It is not surprising that Meredith found himself wincing under the withering fire of accusation that was directed at him, but the enthusiastic admiration of his supporters must have brought some balm to the wounds. William Hardman, afterwards editor of the Morning Post, Meredith's close friend over a period of thirty years, wrote enthusiastically on May 4, 1862, "No man other than yourself could have written it. No other man possesses that wondrous knowledge of the human heart, that weird power of analysis of feelings, that deep and pitiless probing of the souls"^{#1} Swinburne, already Meredith's firm friend and ardent admirer, in his impassioned reply to the Spectator criticism declared that *Modern Love* was "above the aim, and beyond the reach of any but its author."^{#2}

In the 1862 volume Meredith's personal unhappiness and disillusionment found expression. The nature lyrics and the sentimentalities of the 1851 Poems had been replaced by work which is characterised by a power of penetrating observation and independent thought, and by a skilful analysis of human motives and passions.

The twenty years that elapsed between "*Modern Love*" and the 1883 "*Poems and Lyrics*" were marked by the publication in continuous succession of Meredith's greatest novels. Prose was the main stream during this period; verse "no more than a slender affluent."^{#3} As early as 1861 Meredith had confessed that his loyalties were divided between poetry and prose as a means of expression: "As to my love for the Muse," he wrote to the Rev. Augustus Jessop, "I really think that is earnest enough The worst is, that, having taken to prose delineations of character and life, one's affections are divided. I have now a prose damsel crying out to me to have her history completed; and the creatures of a novel are bubbling up; and in truth, being a servant of the public, I must wait till my master commands before I take seriously to singing".^{#4}

^{#1} S. M. Ellis : *A Mid-Victorian Pepys*; pp. 117-118.

^{#2} *The Spectator*, June 7, 1862 : pp.632-633 : By A. C. Swinburne.

^{#3} Edward Dowden : *The Fortnightly Review*, Mar. 1892, pp.337-53.

^{#4} *Letters of George Meredith* p.45 : Nov. 13, 1861; to Rev. Augustus Jessop

In June 1862, Dante Rossetti took a house at 16, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea; here his brother, Swinburne and Meredith were each to have a room for a night or two each week. However, this association did not prove congenial to Swinburne and Meredith, and with them was of short duration. Possibly Dante Rossetti was a distracting companion, for Meredith was now hard at work. "Emilia" was finished in 1863, and was published at the beginning of 1864; "Rhoda Fleming" was nearing completion; and "Vittoria" was already under way. Poetry, the unremunerative Muse, was nevertheless still at times able to lure him away from his novels, and some at least of his Poems and Lyrics were written at this time.

In September, 1864 Meredith married again. His bride was Marie Vulliamy, a girl of French descent, whose charm and sweet nature so captured the heart of George Meredith that his great happiness is patent in every word of his letters at this time. His second marriage proved as enduringly happy as his first was ill-starred; and with his happiness came a new enthusiasm in his work.

"I am working mightily.....," he wrote to William Hardman, "I never had such a fit on me since the age of 21."^{*1} "Rhoda Fleming" was published in 1865, "Vittoria" was issued in serial form in The Fortnightly in 1866, and in a three volume edition in 1867. During 1866, also, Meredith was abroad covering the Austro-Italian War as correspondent to the Morning Post.

Meredith had high hopes of "Vittoria", and when it too failed to find popular favour, there is more than exasperation in his condemnation of the "dominating damnable bourgeoisie"^{*2} which imposed its limitations on art. He was still financially in straitened circumstances; in a letter^{*3} to his son Arthur at this time, he stressed that though there was enough money for essentials, he was by no means wealthy. The demands on his purse were now heavy, as a second son William Maxse had been born in July, 1865, and a daughter Mariette

^{*1} Letters of George Meredith p.158 : Oct. 12, 1864 : to William Hardman.

^{*2} Letters of George Meredith p.189 : March 2, 1867 : to Swinburne.

^{*3} Letters of George Meredith p.212 : Oct. 25, 1870 : to Arthur Meredith.

in June, 1871. On the whole however he was working happily and contentedly; and in addition to novel-writing which continued to be his chief occupation, he was contributing verse to Macmillans, The Fortnightly and the Cornhill. From September, 1870 "The Adventures of Harry Richmond" appeared serially in the Cornhill, and was published as a three volume novel in 1871.

Despite his German education Meredith's sympathies were essentially French, and he had been deeply moved by the Franco-Prussian War. In December, 1870 he wrote to his friend John Morley, "I have a Grand Ode to France - called simply 'France 1870'; from my point of view of sympathy and philosophy; which I think is ours. Latterly I have felt poetically weakened by the pressure of philosophical reflection, but this is going, and a fuller strength comes of it, for I believe I am within the shadow of the Truth, and as it's my nature to sing I may now do well".^{*1}

Three more important novels were to appear however before he published the fruits of his "singing". "Beauchamp's Career" appeared in serial form in the Fortnightly from August 1874, and in book form in 1876; "The Egoist", which marks Meredith's highest achievement in the novel form was published in three volumes in 1879, and was warmly acclaimed by the critics; and "The Tragic Comedians" after its appearance serially in the Fortnightly from October, 1880 was issued in two volumes in 1881.

Meredith's reputation as a writer of fiction was now firmly established, and he was acknowledged by the critics as one of the greatest novelists of his time. His reputation as a poet was still restricted to a minority of the reading public, and judging from many bitter comments made in his letters, he came to regard the publication of verse as an unwise procedure.

In 1876 the chalet in the garden at Box-Hill,^{*2} referred to by Meredith in his letters as "my pavilion", was completed, and almost all his working hours were spent here. Often he would continue writing through the night, and this continuous work was undermining his health and wearing his nerves. By 1881 though Meredith declared in his letters to friends that the composition of verse still came

^{*1} Letters of George Meredith p.232 : Dec. 7, 1870 : to John Morley.

^{*2} Meredith lived at "Flint Cottage" under Box-Hill, from 1867 until his death in 1909.

easily, his health was definitely on the decline and his doctor had warned him against excessive writing.

On the eve of the publication of his next volume of poems, Meredith was obviously in a state of anxiety and trepidation: "I confess with shame that I am at work correcting preparatory to bringing out a volume of poems," he wrote to Maxse, "When this is done I may want to fly Truly the passion to produce verse in our region is accursed. I ask myself why I should labour, and for the third time, pay to publish the result, with a certainty of being yelled at, and haply spat upon, for my pains."¹

Contrary to his fears, "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth" was given lengthy reviews in the leading journals, and among them were articles signed by some of the foremost critics of the day. All hailed with approval the work of a poet who was sufficiently original and brave in spirit to sing of the 'Joy of Earth' in an age preoccupied with 'gloomy noddings over life'. On the whole the critics found the volume to be a remarkably true, original, and often beautiful contribution to English poetry; though he at times lacked 'the instinct of melody' to enable him to give poetic embodiment to his imagination and emotions.

Eleven of the pieces had already been published in various magazines between the years 1865 and 1883, so that this volume may be regarded as the poetic expression of the happiest time in Meredith's personal history and of his most productive literary period. Some of the very finest of his poetry appears in this book, and the happy title is symbolic of that long period of domestic contentment and eager though often inadequately rewarded intellectual activity, which fell to his lot, before sorrows once more closed about him.

Meredith was now becoming almost a recluse, living in his sanctum at Boxhill apart from the world. His failing health often made work impossible, but he still spent much of his time in the chalet, dreaming and thinking, and delighting in the beauty of the changing seasons. He welcomed the visits of friends and admirers, and watched

¹ Letters of George Meredith p.338 : March 5, 1883 : to Admiral Maxse.

the events of the world with keen interest. When younger authors submitted their work to his judgment, he was always ready with helpful criticism and advice.

Meredith must surely have been pleased with the generous reviews of his "Poems and Lyrics", but he still complained querulously of the lack of appreciation of his works. When this volume appeared, he was already engaged on "Diana of the Crossways", published in February, 1885. "Diana" was to prove the most popular of all his works, though this was doubtless due in some measure to the outcry that he was libelling Mrs. Norton. At the end of the same year a further proof of his growing popularity was the publication of a ten volume edition of his novels. The sales were reported to be good, and surely Meredith could no longer with any justification complain of 'public neglect'.

Any satisfaction which Meredith may have derived from the approval of the critics and the appreciation of the reading public was however obscured by the deep personal sorrow which befell him in the same year. The death of his wife on September 17, 1885, after a long painful illness of eighteen months, was a shattering blow; and though Meredith had steeled himself to meet it, he was struck to the heart. His philosophy was strained to breaking point. He never permitted pessimism or cynicism to cast a gloom over his spirits, but his active happiness in living was modified by this bereavement to a patient and determinedly cheerful resignation to the laws of 'Earth'. Meredith lived for over twenty years after the death of his wife, but his philosophy and his thought gained a more sober colouring, and the life of the 'spirit' took on an added meaning: "I cannot get to calm of thought.....,"^{*1} he wrote to John Morley, "Happily for me, I have learnt to live much in the spirit and see brightness on the other side of life."^{*2} "So much grander, vaster, seems her realm of silence. She is in earth, our mother, and I shall soon follow."^{*3} Fortunately Meredith had the comfort of his

^{*1} Letters of George Meredith : to John Morley : p.373; Sept.26, 1885.

^{*2} Letters of George Meredith : to John Morley : p.369; June 21, 1885.

^{*3} Letters of George Meredith : to John Morley : p.377; Jan.1, 1886.

son William and his daughter Mariette, and in their letters there is the glow of a warm mutual affection.

"I am in the very pits of tragic life,"^{*1} Meredith had written in 1885; and it was suitable that the volume of poetry which he published after his great loss should bear the title, "Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life". It was issued by Macmillan in 1887. Many of the band of admiring readers of his poems remained loyal; but his literary mannerisms had now grown upon him so that the book met with more censure than praise at the hands of his critics. Eight of the pieces had previously been published in magazines, and it is significant that these presumably earlier poems were the most favourably criticised. All the reviewers were prepared to admit the earnestness, originality, and intellectual passion of the work, but complained of congestion, obscurity, and faulty rhythm. Judging by the general tone of most of their articles, it seems that the critics undoubtedly found the reading of the book a laborious task.

When Meredith published "Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life" in 1887, he stated that there would be another volume of verse to follow 'of more spiritual flavour'.^{*2} The note of sadness had been struck in the 'Ballads and Poems', but it was an impersonal, conventional expression of the grief which had descended on his life. Those intimate soul-searchings, the spiritual conflict which had been aroused by the brushing, so near to him of the dark wings of death, found personal expression in the later volume, "A Reading of Earth", published at the end of 1888. Meredith had turned to poetry at the first great crisis of his life, and in 1862 had given expression, in *Modern Love*, to his sorrow and bewilderment. Now again, when his faith was torn by grief and conflicting doubts, he found poetic expression for the inner struggle: "Whatever may be thought of a writer's verse," he wrote to Mrs. Gilham in 1888, "it is one of his methods of relieving himself of the burden within him".^{*3} His philosophy had been put to the severest test possible, his faith in

*1 Letters of George Meredith : p.368, June 5, 1885, to Frederick Greenwood, editor of "Pall Mall".

*2 Letters of George Meredith : p.390, Feb. 16, 1887 to George Stevenson

*3 Letters of George Meredith : p.409, March 16, 1888, to Mrs. J.B. Gilham.

life and in himself had wavered, but in "A Reading of Earth" he showed how, after his trial, he had attained once more to the calm acceptance of her laws.

Perhaps because of the intimate nature of its contents, Meredith had requested that no copies of the book should be sent out for review. It therefore attracted very little critical comment; Lathrop, of the Atlantic Monthly, who had read some of the poems found them 'rugged, thoughtful, grim, philosophic not especially poetic'.^{*1} It appeared that Meredith had now come to regard himself as a poet with a message; and provided that message was conveyed, beauty and poetic harmony were of very secondary importance.

After the publication of "The Reading of Earth", the shadows began to gather more densely about the often lonely philosopher of Box-Hill; but at the 'blooming of the year', friends and admirers were cordially invited to visit him and to admire the beauty of the countryside around his home. Meredith seems in the evening of his life to have gathered the love and esteem of his friends as a cloak about him; and there is a genial warmth in his letters replacing the aloofness of his earlier correspondence. He found time for short excursions, and for visits to his friends; but he was still hard at work and spent many hours alone in the chalet, for he felt that he still had much to say and not much time left in which to say it.

His fame was growing steadily, not only in England but abroad, and he was drawing an additional income from America where large sales of his novels were reported. His gratification at American recognition was tinged with a certain cynicism which made him even more disdainful of the British public that had failed to appreciate his work.

Sorrow was to visit the poet again before the end of 1890 with the news of the death of his eldest son Arthur. In his first marriage Meredith had failed not only in the role of husband but

^{*1} The Atlantic Monthly : Vol. LXI pp.178-193 : Feb. 1888 :
G. P. Lathrop.

also of father. There was an air of patronage and strain in his affection for his son which came into serious conflict with Arthur's wilfulness and independence of spirit. After the second marriage the gulf between father and son seemed to have widened, and when ill-health overtook him, Arthur turned, not to his father, but to his half-sister Edith.^{x1}

In 1890 another novel "One of Our Conquerors" began to appear serially in the Fortnightly, and was then published in a three volume edition. Though he was still to produce two more novels, it was to poetry that his attention was chiefly directed during the remaining eighteen years of his life, and in the course of the next few years Meredith published three of the most unusual pieces which a writer has ever seen fit to cast into verse form.

A reprint of 'Modern Love' was in the printer's hands in 1891, the companion piece in the volume being a long ethical and psychological study called "The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady". In addition there were seven shorter poems. Meredith again, as with "A Reading of Earth", decided to send no copies for review and thus withhold the book from the attacks of the reviewers, but he repeatedly recommended 'The Sage Enamoured' to his friends, who evidently found it difficult. The old charge of obscurity was again levelled at him, but Meredith was now to go his own way in poetry regardless of comment. In this poem he was following a light of his own; and beauty and melody, universally regarded as the very core of the altar-flame of poetry, could provide in his opinion, but an incidental and subsidiary glow beside the compelling flame of his 'message'.

The second strange poem, "Jump-to-Glory-Jane", had already appeared in October, 1889 in the Universal Review, but was published as a separate volume in 1892 by Quilter the editor of this journal. Quilter wrote an introductory "Word on the Birth, History, Illustrations and First Reception of 'Jane'", which illustrates the bewilderment which the poem occasioned in the minds both of the critics and the reading public. The critics could not decide whether the

poem was "serious or satirical, grave or flippant, pathetic or farcical".^{#1} Others thought that it was intended as a satire on the Salvation Army.

'Jane' was included in the third volume of verse, which Meredith published in 1892: "Poems: The Empty Purse, with Odes to the Comic Spirit, to Youth in Memory and Verses". 'The Empty Purse' is didactic; Meredith himself admitted that it was not poetry, and the ideas were cast into verse merely because he could find no place for them in his novels.

In these three volumes, when the mood came to him, Meredith produced passages glowing with undeniably poetic fire; but the mood came only fortuitously, and it was a glow which shone amidst a veritable sea of intricate psychological analysis and argument, and the working out of weighty ideas to their ponderous conclusions.

Since 1891 Meredith had been contemplating 'a volume of selections' of his poetry, but six years of prose writing were to intervene before this was published. Though labouring under the handicap of poor health, which caused frequent interruption in his work, he produced another long three-volume novel, "Lord Ormont and his Aminta", in June, 1894. "The Amazing Marriage", his last novel, followed almost immediately, being issued in serial form in Scribner's Magazine, and as a complete novel before the close of 1895.

At 64, Meredith was ataxic and partially crippled, and his excursions were limited to an occasional stroll in his garden. He was unable to remain standing for any length of time; and in 1892, when an honorary degree was conferred upon him by St. Andrew's University, he had to be excused from attendance at the ceremony. After 1892 he was repeatedly in the Doctor's hands, and several successful operations were performed by the famous surgeon Buckston Browne, who had long been an admirer of Meredith's works.

Throughout it all, however, he did not lose his cheerful spirit, and as always he drew strength and healing from the contemplation of nature. The martial bravery of the hollyhocks in his garden, the

#1

The Times : p. 12 : Oct. 27, 1892.

sunshine on the beech-buds, the South-Wester, the glooms and glories of the changing sky: these were now his solace and delight. Will and Mariette, his son and daughter, were both happily married and their occasional visits with their children gladdened the monotony of his quiet life.

In October, 1892 Meredith wrote to a friend that an edition of his poems had been 'sold out';^{*1} this was an indication of the rising tide of appreciation, and the publication of the "Selected Poems" of 1897 was possibly undertaken with the hope that a volume of the poet's best work would prove popular. The hope was so far realised that the book received critical notice from almost every important journal of the day; but its reception was the usual intermingling of praise and censure. Meredith, as poet, had made another bid for popularity, and again his success was only partial. Because of the intellectual nature of his work, and its consequently limited popular appeal, he could not with any reason have hoped to become a 'best-seller'; but if he required final proof that he had reached literary fame, it must have been provided in the publication of his collected works in thirty-two volumes in the handsome Edition de Luxe produced by Constable and Co. from 1894 - 1898. Even the early poems from the 1851 volume found place in this edition; nevertheless he continued to style himself 'an unpopular author'. On February 12, 1898, his Seventieth birthday, further proof was superadded when he was presented with a memorial of congratulation signed by thirty 'men and women of foremost distinction' in the sphere of literature and art. Meredith was grateful and deeply touched at this mark of esteem.^{*2}

From 1896 the poet was busy writing his odes: 'The Revolution', 'Napoleon', and 'Alsace-Lorraine', which appeared separately in the "Cosmopolis", and were reprinted, with the addition of 'France 1870', in book form in 1898. Meredith himself was pleased with his achieve-

^{*1} Letters of George Meredith p.456, Oct. 20, 1892, to Mrs. Walter Palmer, who asked for a book of poems.

^{*2} Letters of George Meredith p.493, Feb. 14, 1898 to Leslie Stephen.

ment. "I make history sing", he declared, "while interpreting her."^{*1} 'The Odes' attracted considerable attention and were reviewed in many contemporary journals, including French and American. On the whole they were much admired, but the critics complained of too much intellectual violence, and felt that the poet was too often overshadowed by the thinker, critic, satirist, historian or philosopher.

Later in the same year Constable printed a handsome volume of seventeen of Meredith's most popular pieces. These appear to have been chosen from "Selected Poems" as they are in the same order. The book was entitled "The Nature Poems of George Meredith", and one hundred and fifty copies only were printed in the first issue; a second cheaper issue appeared in 1907. The book was beautifully illustrated by William Hyde the artist, and the Times^{*2} reviewer regarded this publication as 'evidence of Mr. George Meredith's growing popularity'.

The last volume of poetry which appeared during his lifetime was "A Reading of Life", published by Constable in 1901. This book with its intermingling of philosophy and poetry is the distillation of the poet's wisdom after seventy-three years of glad and full living. The ardour and freshness of youth; the interthreading of sorrow, happiness, deep thought and exacting literary labour which composed Meredith's maturity; the long and tranquil old age: all these strands had been woven together by the loom of the years to form the web of a comprehensive philosophy of life.

Meredith was now a chronic invalid, crippled, and so deaf that conversation was embarrassment and social gatherings a torture. He had survived many of his friends and acquaintances, and the loneliness of old age was beginning to descend upon him, but he still regarded it as his duty to 'keep the young generations in hail';^{*3} "When I hear that I have been of some use to young men in

^{*1} Letters of George Meredith p.487, Dec. 28, 1896, to Frederick Greenwood.

^{*2} The Times, Thursday, Aug. 4, 1898 p.12.

^{*3} The Times, Thursday, Aug. 4, 1898 p.12.
The Empty Purse

aiding them to see the real life and guide their steps in it, I am content to think that I have lived....."^{*1} The hope that 'nothing good is ever lost',^{*2} had strengthened with the passage of years into conviction; and with this conviction came the faith that 'the yielding of the breath is not extinction'.^{*3} More than ever before he now placed the emphasis on the importance of 'mind - the gateway of the spiritual'.^{*4}

"A Reading of Life" has been described as Meredith's poetic testament: the testament of a poet who was essentially a teacher and expositor. Owing probably to the depth of philosophical thought in the volume it did not create much stir in journalistic circles; but among the reviewers appear the names of such well-known Meredithian admirers as Richard le Gallienne and Arthur Symonds. On the whole, the critics were more generous with their praise than in their reviews of his former volumes, for Meredith was now universally acclaimed philosopher and seer, and both his fame and his venerable age predisposed them to leniency when dealing with his faults, and unstinted admiration when extolling his merits.

The next eight years were spent living quietly at Box-Hill. Reading was now his chief occupation as often the mere physical exertion of writing would have overtaxed his strength. Bessie Nicholls, a trained nurse, was his constant companion during the last few years. In spirit he was as cheerful as ever, his interest in the world and in his friends seemed even to strengthen; but the flame of life which had once glowed so vividly was beginning to flicker as it burnt low. George Meredith was now one of the most important personages in England, and though fame at this eleventh hour possibly meant little to him it must have brought some consolation. Men of note in various spheres journeyed to his home to visit the great novelist and poet; his views on many diverse subjects were

^{*1} Letters of George Meredith p.509, May 17, 1900 : to G.M. Trevelyan.

^{*2} Letters of George Meredith p.510, July 1, 1900 : to Mrs. Duff on death of her brother Admiral Maxse.

^{*3} Letters of George Meredith p.520, Oct. 3, 1901 : to Mrs. Wilson in letter of condolence on death of her son.

^{*4} Letters of George Meredith p.524, Jan. 29, 1902 : to Lady Ulrica Duncombe.

*3;4 With the approach of old age, Meredith's attitude appears to have changed from Pantheism to a form of Agnosticism; though at no stage did he believe in individual survival after death. (cf. pp 33, 36)

sought and published in the press; he received the Order of Merit in 1905; his Eightieth birthday was an event of national importance. Yet to Meredith, the man, life had worn thin. His lifelong friend, Admiral Maxse had died in 1900. Leslie Stephen, one of Meredith's most intimate friends of his athletic days, was now also crippled and disabled, and to him Meredith wrote with nostalgic longing for the days of their robust manhood: "We who have loved the motion of legs, and the sweep of the winds, we come to this."^{x1} Swinburne, who had written the famous defence of 'Modern Love', died in April, 1909. Meredith faced the thought of his own death with resignation, and in accordance with his philosophy regarded it as a submission to the laws of Nature, the great Mother of all. He died at Box-Hill on 18 May, 1909, just one month after Swinburne.

After his death his unpublished poems were collected, and published later in the same year under the title "Last Poems". In the volume there is little which is equal to Meredith's best work, though there is no evidence of failing vitality or flagging mental power on the part of their composer. There is a greater measure of detachment in these poems than in much of his former work; a number of them moreover are occasional pieces which reflect Meredith's increased interest in national and world affairs.

"Last Poems was treated with reverence as the farewell utterance of a great man, valuable for what it symbolised rather than for its intrinsic merit:

"When aged Nestor stepped into the arena, the assembled warriors looked for no dazzling feat of arms. It was enough that he should rise up, and lay his hand upon the spear or shield. A flood of memories encompassed them; and to rouse such memories was to be invincible Not otherwise is it with our veteran poet. In his last volume we treasure and crown the ever-recurring touches which bring back to us the matchless achievements of his prime."^{x2}

^{x1} Letters of George Meredith, p.555 : Feb. 14, 1904 : to Leslie Stephen.

^{x2} The Athenaeum; p.551 : Nov. 6, 1909.

A SURVEY AND ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL ESTIMATES OF MEREDITH'S POETRY,
EXPRESSED IN CONTEMPORARY PERIODICAL REVIEWS.

Near the beginning of the century it became fashionable to decry everything "Victorian", in literature as in other spheres of activity. At present there is a revival of interest in this period, which, in spite of its limitations, produced much important and valuable work. Meredith, with his contemporaries, therefore, suffered an undeserved neglect, but now that the age is again coming into its own, we are realising that he "has much to say in his contortionist way."^{x1}

In the closing chapters of Sencourt's "Life"^{x2} of Meredith I found an interesting comment. On the death of the great writer a service was held for him in Westminster Abbey to mark the nation's grief; but more significant, perhaps, was "a sense of personal loss in hearts that knew him only from his writings. Among the many splendid tributes sent by those whose names were well known, there was a simple wreath of laurel from a boy still at school of whom none had heard, not even the poet himself. His name was Siegfried Sassoon". Actually Sassoon was not a "schoolboy" in 1909, but a young man of twenty-three at Cambridge University where we are told "Meredith gained an early stronghold". Years afterwards Sassoon tried to describe the attraction which Meredith's "lyrical masterpieces" held for him. "I....was very properly thrilled by their exultant energy and descriptive loveliness" he declared. "The only thing I found to complain of in them was that they were written with a technical ingenuity altogether impossible to echo or imitate".^{x3} Above all he was held by the sensuous vitality of Meredith's nature philosophy. This year, Siegfried Sassoon who is now himself a famous poet, is adding a further tribute to his "simple wreath of laurel", in his "Life of George Meredith" advertised to appear on September 16. Meredith's appeal to certain

x1 The Athenaeum: October 26, 1912, p.474.

x2 R. E. Sencourt: The Life of George Meredith, p.300 (1929).

x3 Siegfried Sassoon: The Weald of Youth, p.30, 1942.

temperaments and to certain intellects was immediate and lasting, and the devotion of his following condoned to some extent his lack of a widespread popularity. Throughout his literary career Meredith complained bitterly and monotonously in his letters of the neglect of the public and the lack of appreciation of his poetry. An examination of the critical reviews, however, reveals that from the first he received a due measure of respectful admiration; for a poet who arrogantly and deliberately refused to pander to popular taste, and who "flung his mannerisms in his critics' faces", ^{x1} he later received more than his due measure of forbearance and veneration.

In 1851 Charles Kingsley ^{x2} pronounced him to be a young writer 'of very high promise'; there was poetic fervour in his work, combined with truth and originality, but there was as yet a 'want of mastery'. William Michael Rossetti ^{x3} placed him in the class of 'singers' as distinct from 'true poets', but predicted that when he gained experience, and could command an atmosphere of nobler thought, 'the singer might become a poet'.

By the time 'Modern Love' appeared in 1862, Swinburne was able to refer to him as 'one of the leaders of English literature', whose work was treated by a host of admirers with consideration and respect. In originality of thought, he said, and in 'passionate and various beauty', "Modern Love" was beyond the power of any other contemporary poet. He declared that he was voicing the opinions of numerous discerning critics, when he stated that 'A poet of Mr. Meredith's rank can no more be profited by the advocacy of his admirers than injured by the rash or partial attack of his critics'. ^{x4} Swinburne's letter, it is true, was written in an access of enthusiastic partisanship, but there is evidence that many other readers of Meredith's poems were similarly enthusiastic.

x1 J. E. Priestly: George Meredith, Chapter II (1926).

x2 Review of 1851 "Poems" by Charles Kingsley in Fraser's Magazine, Dec. 1851, pp. 629-31.

x3 Review of 1851 "Poems" by W. M. Rossetti in The Critic, Nov. 15, 1851, pp. 539-40.

x4 In Spectator, June 7, 1862, pp. 632-3; reply to review of May, 24.

By 1883, Meredith's novels had become 'the favourite reading of many intellectual men',^{x1} so that the appearance of the Poems and Lyrics in that year aroused great interest. The two earlier volumes of poetry had been welcomed for their unmistakable vein of originality, and the new volume was found to contain true poetic gifts: it was "a book for poets"¹ and for all who enjoy poetry.

It was in 1887 with the publication of "Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life" that the cries of 'obscurity' and 'difficulty' first became prominent. The critics admitted his earnestness and his noble purpose, even his genius, but found that in spite of conspicuous success in some individual poems, his "achievement is often leagues in rear of the inspiration".^{x2} At his best his admirers maintained that Meredith was irresistible, and never said anything not worth hearing. In 1892, when the public was presented with the enigmas of "The Empty Purse" and "Jump-to-Glory-Jane", we are told that in spite of their bewilderment, there was 'a not inconsiderable body of persons who have the highest appreciation of what Mr. Meredith chooses to give them';^{x3} they were prepared to admire even where they did not fully understand, realising that amidst the burrs and prickles of his obscurities and mannerisms there were many wonderful blossomings of poetic genius.

On the other hand, another group of admirers was now beginning to arise, unintelligent enthusiasts, "fools", as the Saturday Review contemptuously designated them, who applauded Meredith merely because they could not understand him and "went into ecstasies over his weakest points".

x1 The Times, June 11, 1883, p. 4.

x2 The Athenaeum, June 11, 1887, p. 759.

x3 The Saturday Review, December 17, 1892, p. 718.

When 'Selected Poems' appeared in 1897 The Times^{x1} declared that a one-volume edition of the complete poems would be more welcome than these selections "to all admirers of their Author's genius". Meredith was not likely ever to prove a popular poet said the reviewer; and because of his faults he could never take his place among the greatest of the Victorian writers. In spite of his limitations, however, his work was 'rich enough in merits to earn the lasting gratitude of all who keep room in their hearts for good poetry'. "We have found Mr. Meredith the poet somewhat cold," wrote the Academy critic,^{x2} "and lamented a certain obscurity in his verse; but that it is the verse of a true, and, at times, a splendid poet, no one with eyes or ears can for a moment doubt".

In 1898 we learn that "Mr. Meredith and all his ways are now accepted. Every cultured person is expected to understand him as a matter of course."^{x3} "True Meredithians," we are told, desired nothing simple from the pen of the master, and made a cult of his obscurity. In the face of this, however, the Saturday Review^{x4} regarded the "Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History" to have failed in spite of their stupendous power. There were so many flagrantcies, defiances and irregularities that the reviewer was obliged to 'record with genuine grief our conviction that this ambitious cycle of Odes had better have been left unattempted'.

After 1900 Meredith's place is assured as being undoubtedly among the immortals, but the critics become increasingly harassed, torn between respect for his genius, delight in the electric current of his authentic poetry, and the agony of interpreting what he had written. They decided that

x1 The Times: May 31, 1898, p. 6

x2 The Academy: October 2, 1897.

x3 The Bookman, Dec. 1898, pp. 78-9 by A.M.

x4 The Saturday Review, Nov. 12, 1898, p. 645.

appreciation of Meredith was 'a fortunate accident of tempera-
^{x1}ment': "The conservative traditional academic type of mind
 reads him, when it reads him at all, with impatience, too
 much resenting his rebellious impressionism to appreciate
 and enjoy his virile creativeness, his riotous vitality".

His poetry had passed into the common heritage
 because of its author's 'love of Nature, his profound insight
 into human life, his noble courage, his passion for freedom'.^{x2}
 The slim volume of his 'Last Poems' was treated with reverence
 and gratitude.

When the complete 'Poetical Works' was published in
 1912 we are told that a host of admirers would welcome the
 edition; Meredith had made a valuable and in many respects
 an inimitable contribution to English poetry, and if only he
 had been less obscure he would very likely have been a popular
 poet. And yet when the general consensus of opinion is
 sought, after all Meredith's great qualities have been admit-
 ted and appreciated, we still must say, with the Cape Times
^{x3}critic, in the poet's own words:

"Beauty's queen some other way is wed."

Meredith was writing in an age which attached
 especial importance to Nature and nature-poetry, so it is
 this aspect of his poetry which received particular consider-
 ation in contemporary criticisms. In his youth and early
 manhood George Meredith loved walking and knew the Surrey
 countryside round his home intimately; it was during his
 ramblings in this district that he developed that 'peculiar
 affinity with Nature which remained his spiritual birthright
^{x4}to the end'.

^{x1} The Forum, New York, April 1910, pp. 441-7 by Richard le
 Gallienne.

^{x2,3} The Cape Times, Nov. 22, p. 11.

^{x4} The Bookman, Feb. 1928, No. 437, "George Meredith; His
 Association with the Pre-Raphaelites", by S. M. Ellis.

"Now standing on this hedgeside path,
A thing of Nature am I now
Abroad without a sense of feeling
Born not of her bosom....."

These lines from the 1851 Poems struck a new and individual note in nature poetry and revealed a refreshingly open-air approach which could not fail to arrest his readers. Even his earliest critics commented on the 'naturalness', the 'health and sweetness' and the 'friendliness' in these first youthful poems.^{x1} It is this identification of man with nature as flesh of her flesh, spirit of her spirit which is Meredith's outstanding contribution to the nature-attitudes of Victorian poetry. In the 1851 volume this attitude is tentatively approached by the poet, and was later more clearly defined and elaborated into a firm creed. The Victorian Age was the time of the Christianity-Evolution, Science-Religion conflicts, and Man's relationship to Nature was one of the problems with which men's minds were obsessed.

The reviewers of the "Poems" of 1851, confronted by a nature-philosophy which was not merely an innovation, but also still in its formative stages, were naturally at a disadvantage.^{x1} They recognised the 'honest-landscape-painting' and the poet's close observation of and delight in nature; but did not realise that they were being presented with the preliminary steps in the formulation of an entirely new philosophy.^{x2} W. M. Rossetti^{x3} decided that he found Meredith upon examination to be 'a kind of limited Keats', as he was a 'seeing or sensuous poet'.

Later critics were able to formulate Meredith's attitude with greater precision. They found that he was 'an intense naturalist'^{x3} for whom the book of nature was unsealed,^{x4} and he approached "transcendent influences" through the

x1 Fraser's Magazine, Dec. 1851, pp. 618-32 by Charles Kingsley.

x2 The Critic: Nov. 15, 1851, pp. 539-40; W. M. Rossetti.

x3 The Times: June 11, 1883, p.4.

x4 The Academy, July 21, 1883, pp. 37-8; Mark Pattison.

real, by living in close communion with the life of nature. He interpreted natural magic as seen by a poet's eye and with a poet's sensibility, but 'never lost touch with "rich solid earth"^{x1}'; and it was by close and eager observation that he gained his insight into nature.

His reviewers at first tried to find parallel attitudes in Wordsworth, Tennyson, Keats, Byron, Coleridge or even Herrick; but later they recognised that his treatment of nature was distinctly his own. In the course of his review of the "Poetical Works" for the Literary Supplement of the Spectator, the critic seemed to be representing the general consensus of opinion when he wrote: "Meredith's genius... is expressed completely and with an undeniable originality in 'Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth'. The spirit of these and of similar poems in 'A Reading of Earth' is without kindred. Wordsworth considers nature as a mystic:....Coleridge, on the contrary, has always a touch of sensuousness; his vision seeks not so much an ideal as an attenuated and ethereal beauty. Meredith does not look upon earth from either point of view.He interprets earth to us, not as an individual mind separated and differentiated from the objects of his consciousness but simply as the sum of that consciousness itself...his interpretation is to all the senses at once"^{x2}. Meredith's genius, maintained this critic, was the emotional interpretation of nature, and his method was that of "rapid accumulation of detail aimed at a cumulative effect."^{x2}

Meredith had, as Stephen Gwynn noted,^{x3} "a pagan sense of the nearness and intimacy of nature, interpenetrated by a scientific consciousness of the processes of Evolution", and presents us with a view of Earth "seen through a brain not a temperament"; as a result, Meredith was unrivalled in subtle

x1 The Saturday Review, March 12, 1910, pp. 334-5.

x2 Dec. 7, 1912, pp. 931-2.

x3 The Fortnightly Review, July 1901, pp. 159-161 by Stephen Gwynn.

intimate interpretation of nature. Richard le Gallienne, one of his most enthusiastic admirers stated that "If ever Nature took the pen and wrote, that hand was not Wordsworth's but Meredith's. Wordsworth was a Puritan with a great literary gift moralising upon Nature: Meredith a pagan, understanding her, one of her children. Wordsworth loved Nature like a preacher, Meredith loved her like a man,"^{x1}

Gradually the critics came to realise that the essential difference between Meredith and the other Great Romantics and Victorians, in their attitudes towards nature was a difference not of intensity but of approach. The other poets regarded Man as apart from Nature - he has, perforce, his environment in nature, but, in their view, he is in essence alien, of different origin and of different destiny from Nature. In Meredith's view there is a scientific acceptance of Man as having his setting in and of Nature; Man and all other aspects of Nature are manifestations of the same Earth, so that he may claim kinship with the stars wheeling in the heavens and with the dust under his feet. It is this 'affinity' with the life of Nature which struck a unique note in Meredith's poetry.

Indissolubly linked with his attitude to Nature was thus his attitude towards man. In the work of Keats and Shelley, and to a lesser degree in that of all the other Romantic poets, there is a sense of frustration; Man is encompassed by Nature, confined by his own humanity, his ideals and aspirations thwarted by the links which bind him to earth. In Meredith the passion of pent-up emotion which we find in Shelley and Keats is replaced by a sense of freedom and space; Man is a part of Nature and is living with Nature in the open and under the sun. Meredith sang in 'simple contentedness or throbbing of heart',^{x2} and love, for him, was not sensuous

x1 The Forum, New York, April 1910, pp. 441-7 by Richard le Gallienne.

x2 The Critic: Nov. 15, 1851, pp. 539-540 by W.M.R. (William Michael Rossetti).

intoxication, but as natural as the song of a bird. It was this quality which gave to Meredith's early poetry that sense of companionship and friendliness which ^{W.M.} Rossetti praised. The critics found that in the 'delicious little love-poems' ^{x1} of the 1851 edition there was warmth both of imagination and of emotion, but it was the warmth of affection rather than of passionate love.

In the 'Modern Love' poems of 1862, though the reviewers complained of the morbid theme of the title piece, they were all prepared to admire his dramatic and penetrating insight into the human heart, and to admit that he was "a sharp observer and skilful analyst of human motives" ^{x2}. In the 'Poems and Lyrics' of 1883 they found many "strongly human poems throwing light on the tangled web of human existence" ^{x3}, for Meredith was a realist not only as regards nature, but also in his attitude to man.

In reviewing 'The Empty Purse' of 1892, the critics found that the lesson which the poet was trying to teach was that the real meaning of life could be deciphered only in intimacy with Nature: and Nature meant human nature as well as the universe of outward things. Nature and Man alike were "evidences of the divine energy ever feeding with celestial fire this mysterious activity we call life" ^{x4}. Real wisdom therefore came to those who

'hither, thither fare,
Close interthreading Nature' with our kind.'

They found that in his attitude towards man Meredith was deeply serious and penetratingly philosophical. He had an eager and passionate heart guided by a clear head, and was "a social satirist as well as a spiritual teacher and poet..."

x1 Fraser's Magazine, Dec. 1851, pp. 618-632, by Charles Kingsley

x2 The Westminster Review, July and October 1862, p. 284.

x3 The Times, June 11, 1883.

34 The Forum, New York, April, 1910, pp. 441-7, by Richard le Gallienne.

Life for him was something infinitely worth-while; even at its most artificial it was "a thing of magic and mysterious destiny."^{x1} It was this attitude which, his critics agreed, made Meredith's poetry so invaluable.

In 'A Reading of Earth' the poet tried to communicate to his readers his conviction of the essential brotherhood between man and earth. In the later volume 'A Reading of Life', life was regarded in its spiritual aspect, and man was revealed engaged in a perpetual conflict in 'his march from the wilderness of the beasts and the haunted night to the land of dawn.'^{x2} In man's nature there were two spirits in opposition, the "athletic-energetic versus the indulgent-languorous." The way of happiness and true sanity lay in steering a middle course, and this way was not always easy to find:

"Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul x3
When hot for certainties in this our life!"

Meredith realised too that man's progress was hindered by his 'devil of self', for he had to face not only outward circumstances but his own weaknesses and limitations:

"In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot;
We are betrayed by what is false within." x3

Our attitude to life should be one of unselfishness, of preparation for those who are to follow us -

"Keep the young generations in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house." x4

It was generally agreed that Meredith was a poet with a valuable message, a thinker who could provide a solution of the problem of man's life. His interest in his fellows was warm and eager; and in his ability to see a hundred elements in every character, and a hundred aspects of every situation, his critics compared him to Shakespeare.

It was a relief from the prevailing despondency of poetry at the time to read the work of a poet with a radiant faith in life; one who showed his love of light and laughter,

x1 The Forum, New York, April, 1910, pp. 441-7 by Richard le Gallienne.

x2 The Monthly Review, October, 1901, pp. 20-21.

x3 Modern Love, 1862.

x4 The Empty Purse, 1892.

his delight in living, and his sensitive apprehension of the beauty of Earth. ^{x1} Mark Pattison in his review of the "Poems and Lyrics" of 1883 was enthusiastic about Meredith's optimism and healthy wisdom: 'In contract with the pessimistic tone and despairing notes of the modern school,' he wrote, 'Mr. Meredith offers "a song of gladness", and smiles with Shakespeare at a generation "ranked in gloomy noddings over life"'.

Though with his acutely sensitive nature he must often have drained the bitter cup to its dregs, Meredith did not sing the misery of earth. He was, as one critic put it, "among the very few essentially subtle writers from whom nevertheless the dim and dejected moods are alien. His mind is only at home in clear light. He belongs to the morning."^{x2} On the other hand, Meredith did not retire to a golden clime of his imagination divorced from reality; but could declare his 'jubilant affirmation of the joyous significance of life'^{x3} even at its most artificial and sordid. His message was robust, manly, and bracing, and his faith so clear that it remained unshaken to the end.

The critics of the 1881 volume remarked that the best poems of that selection were those whose spirit was the spirit of youth. This was the secret of Meredith's persistent hope and faith through the advancing years: he kept the heart of youth, and with it he retained his tolerance and his ability to keep pace with the advance of life. At his best he was able to combine sensuousness with manliness and intellectual vigour in a way which appeals to youth in all generations. Meredith is always serious when dealing with the questions with which youth is preoccupied: the passion of love, and philosophy of life. He is a didactic poet in that he tries to teach youth

x1 The Academy, July 21, 1883, pp. 37-38 by Mark Pattison.
 x2 The Saturday Review, Nov. 13, 1909, pp. IV - V.
 x3 The Forum, New York.

how to make the most of its passions, hopes, and dreams, and how to learn to face the fact that 'the best things do not last', without losing faith either in them or in life itself. All his life Meredith delighted in those qualities which fall within the special province of youth - physical strength, laughter, courage, and hope.

Writing in *The Nation* of November, 1912, one reviewer has given a good summing-up of Meredith's peculiar faith: "He is essentially a religious poet," he wrote, "and a religious poet who appeals especially to those who, having no definite religion, feel most uncomfortable when they are pressed to affirm anything about the nature of the universe or the soul, and yet whose deepest instinct it is to be loyal to life".^{x1} Meredith's courageous acceptance of man's essential mortality is affirmed in a couplet which is frequently quoted:

"Into the breast that gives the rose,
Shall I with shuddering fall?"

He expressed no hope of a life after death;^{*} in the great calamities his creed might not be so sustaining, but once we have managed to struggle up out of the dark defile ourselves, Meredith will be ready to afford the courage to strengthen us.

"We shall not enter into the question," remarked *The Times* critic of 1883, "whether a philosophy fed on nature is sufficient to satisfy all the aspirations of the human soul."^{x2}

Any creed without some concept of supernatural values must lack universal appeal, as it is too impersonal, and at the same time too much responsibility is thrown on the individual. Meredith's philosophy therefore, although preached with all the fervour of religious conviction, is necessarily limited in its power of attracting converts. There is no denying however that as far as it goes, his philosophy of life is sane and wholesome. Charles Kingsley commented on this quality in the

x1 *The Nation*, November 23, 1912, pp. 359-60: "A Young Man's Poet."

x2 *The Times*, June 11, 1883, p.4.

* cf. p. 20 (see footnote)

1851 volume: the poet's attitude was "healthful and consistent and living," he declared, "through every branch and spray of detail".^{x1}

When Meredith turned to the "deep and painful subject"^{x2} of "Modern Love", he gave much offence to the Victorian moralists. The Spectator critic, who roused Swinburne to such indignant retaliation, was not the only reviewer who thought the poem "a grave moral mistake".^{x3} Meredith was regarded as a "clever bold meretricious man", interested, they declared, in decay and deformity and death, and he would need to achieve "a healthier purpose, and a purer taste" if he wished to please the delicacy of the Victorian public. It was this same "loathsome series of phenomena" which stirred Hardman and Swinburne, among a host of other admirers, to enthusiasm.^{x4} Swinburne declared that though the poem did not suit 'nursery morality' its theme would appeal to men, for there was a depth of imagination and clear understanding and revelation of the human heart and emotions which were beyond the power of any other writer.

Apart from "The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady", which was given very little critical notice in contemporary papers, "Modern Love" was the only volume of poetry which caused Meredith's morality and purity of taste to be questioned. Frequently his obvious sincerity and seriousness of purpose met with warm approval: "Mr. Meredith rarely says anything not worth hearing," the Athenaeum^{x5} reviewer wrote in 1887. "He has too much ability for that; and, besides, he is strenuously in earnest about his work. He has a noble sense of the dignity of art and the responsibilities of the artist; he will set down nothing that is, to his mind, unworthy to be recorded; his treatment of his material is distinguished by the presence of an

x1 Fraser's Magazine, Dec. 1851, pp. 618-32, by Charles Kingsley.

x2 The Spectator, May 24, 1882, pp. 580-1.

x3 The Saturday Review, October 24, 1853, pp. 562-3.

x4 Swinburne's reply to Spectator criticism: June 7, 1862, pp. 632-3.

x5 June 11, 1887, by W. E. Henley.

intellectual passion (as it were) that makes whatever he does considerable and deserving of attention and respect.⁶

It was the spiritual and intellectual content of Meredith's poetry which gave it its abiding value and appeal. He was always careful to 'give to imagination some pure light', and therefore addressed himself to man's intelligence rather than to his emotions, since intelligence is the highest form of human consciousness. 'More brain, O Lord, more brain!' ^{x1} was his appeal, with a consistent disregard of the easier appeal to the senses. As a result his critics found that Meredith gave them 'practical faith in the invisible powers and the divine significance of the human struggle,' ^{x2} a faith moreover which was founded on fact. To the end of his life Meredith kept his passion for beauty, whether in nature or in human beings; and it was the beauty of earth, he maintained, which linked one generation to the next.

When "Poems Written in Early Youth" appeared in 1910, ^{x3} we find a critic declaring that 'Meredith is primarily a moralist.' Evidently the odium which 'Modern Love' had brought upon him had long been forgotten. Yet, in spite of the emphasis on morality, which usually goes hand in hand with conservatism, Meredith repeatedly declared that precedents and traditions should not be allowed to fetter progress. Reformers were usually greeted with denunciation; but this denunciation should be no deterrent, in Meredith's view, as to a man of sincere intention it could bring only purification of purpose:

"The young generation! ah there is the child
Of our souls down the ages! to bleed for it proof
That souls we have," ^{x4}

and soul, for Meredith, meant intellect, 'brain'.

Meredith declared that he was writing in the cause of progress and not to please the conventions of the drawing-room. Courage was his favourite virtue, and he praised this quality in

^{x1} Modern Love.

^{x2} The Forum, New York, April 1910, pp.441-7 by Richard le Gallienne.

^{x3} The Bookman, March, 1910, pp. 274-5.

^{x4} The Empty Purse.

women, above tenderness and self-sacrifice, to the astonishment of the Victorian world. Love, for Meredith, was "noble strength on fire"^{x1}; vanity and sentimentality he detested, as these corrupt the true passion of love. To-day when women have achieved a certain measure of equality with men, we are apt to underrate the degree of innovation in Meredith's attitude towards women, but among his contemporaries he was regarded as their champion and spokesman. He was an ardent advocate of the enfranchisement of women, and a supporter of the suffragettes. Meredith took up arms against the injustice of man's assumption of superiority and his usual overbearing attitude towards the opposite sex. His long philosophical poem "The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady" was pronounced as both trenchant and daring, as he adopted the unconventional standpoint of being more concerned with the purity of spirit of a woman, than with her physical chastity.

Meredith was, as le Gallienne^{x2} stated, an innovator both as thinker and artist, and he grouped Meredith with Browning and Carlyle as "inspired prophetic journalists, moulders of the spiritual aspirations of their time rather than enduring voices of the eternal meanings. Meredith was the poet of Evolution, the first to express the idea that death and struggle are the laws of existence and are necessary to bring living things to their perfection; and he was the first poet whose acceptance of man's mortality, of the transience of all that is best in life, of the cruel destructiveness of nature 'red in tooth and claw', deepened and confirmed his sense of the beauty of earth."^{x3} "Nature, in her varying moods, "declared the Times^{x4} reviewer, in summing up Meredith's attitude, "is the goddess who reveals directly the answer to all manner of

x1 The Nation, Nov. 23, 1912, pp. 359-60.

x2 The Forum, New York, April 1910, pp. 441-7, by Richard le Gallienne.

x3 The Nation, Nov. 23, 1912, pp. 359-60, "A Young Man's Poet".

x4 The Cape Times, Nov. 22, 1912, p.11.

doubt and difficulty." Prayer was wholesome and valuable, in Meredith's view, because it was "the throb of Nature through the human soul", and in times of stress would help us to reach acceptance of Nature's law.

Even in the reviews of his first poems the critics noted that Meredith 'hankered'^{x1} after novelty; and this hankering was to increase with the years. By 1883 the critics decided that there was in his poems 'very little that is conventional or old-fashioned.....dealt with in a manner that is far from being commonplace....They are Protestant and destructive.'^{x2} Already they were beginning to refer to the unconventionality in his work as the 'Meredithian quality'. When the "French Odes" appeared in 1898 they were found to be bewilderingly unconventional both in diction and treatment.^{x3} Francis Thompson, after reading 'The Revolution', was in a fervour of mingled enthusiasm and bewilderment: "The poem has a devil in it," he complained; he was amazed by "its sins, its flagrances, its defiant pitching to the devil of all law recognised even by the boldest.... I am in tune withmost audacity, but Mr. Meredith leaves me gasping...For the Ode is wonderful, though an unlawful wonder."

After 1890 the complaint became more and more frequent that in his revolt against convention, Meredith was approaching dangerously near to a state of anarchy. His originality became perverseness, and in his determination not to compromise with his readers he developed a 'mental shorthand' which was almost unintelligible. He flew in the face of all the laws of poetical composition, coined his own words and phrases for the occasion, and crowded one epigram on another, until he often gave the impression, in the words of a Times critic, that he was "throwing away the gold and gathering up the ore".^{x4}

x1 The Critic, Nov. 15, 1861, pp. 539-40, by W.M.R.

x2 The Contemporary Review, Sept. 1903, pp.465-6, by W. P. Ker.

x3 The Academy, March 12, 1893, p.293.

x4 The Athenaeum, July 20, 1901, pp. 81-82.

W. L. Courtney, in 1883, said that before Meredith could achieve eminence as a poet he would have to learn the lesson of simplicity in song; his work was "too full of artificiality, of poetic conceits, of far-fetched circumlocutions and periphrases, to mirror with perfect fidelity the difficult simplicity of Nature."^{x1} Many of Meredith's weaknesses, however, sprang from an excess of his main strength, an unmatched intellectual vigour and picturesqueness. His admirers pointed out that the atmosphere which he wished to create, and the moods which he desired to suggest were beyond the power of suggestiveness of conventional forms of expression; therefore the suggestive imagery which he used was likewise remote from the commonplace; and although, as Pattison^{x2} declared, Meredith was unsurpassed in vigorous use of language, yet he found ordinary English word-usage inadequate, and invented numerous strange compounds which he could use as 'stop-gaps'. These compounds are often clumsy and unnecessary, but he found them so convenient as a labour-saving device in his search for the exact word to convey his meaning, that their use became a habit which grew upon him.

With the publication of 'Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life' in 1887, it was evident that the weight of intellect was beginning to obscure the more harmonious elements in Meredith's work, and the critics looked back longingly to the 'clearness, freshness, and directness of 1851, as compared with the tortuosities of the new volume. Some of his poems they pronounced 'conundrums'; they suffered under the strain of reading his 'linked obscurity long-drawn out;' they found 'The Song of Theodolinda' 'wild mystic and unintelligible as any chaunt of dancing dervish';^{x3} and yet through it all they could feel the pulse of genius and an amazing intellectual scope. "At his hardest and knottiest", wrote W. E. Henley^{x4} in the Saturday

x1 The Fortnightly Review, Nov. 1883, pp. 717-8, W. L. Courtney.

x2 The Academy, July 21, 1883, pp. 37-8, by Mark Pattison.

x3 The Academy, June 11, 1887, p. 406, by J. M. Gray.

x4 The Saturday Review, June 11, 1887, p. 851.

Review, "as at his loftiest and most luminous, he is unmistakably a man of genius". The general critical attitude^{x1} towards this volume is well expressed in the Athenaeum:

"To be concentrated in form, to be suggestive in material, to say nothing that is not of permanent value, and only to say it in such terms as are charged to the fullest with significance - this would seem to be the aim and end of Mr. Meredith's ambition. Of simplicity in his own person he seems incapable."

The French Odes were termed a 'giant exercise in ode-making',^{x2} marvels of brilliant energy and of rapid authoritative intellectual force, but not the type of poetry which one reads for pleasure. The critics were humble in their admiration for the great qualities in the volume, but found themselves alternately dazzled and darkened by the confusing 'whirl of imagery and gymnastic thought' throughout the long poems. One reader,^{x2} quoting a line from the poem which aptly described his state of bewilderment, confessed that:

"The innumerable whelmed him, and he fell."

In spite, however, of the 'confusion of restless intellectual violence',^{x3} the Odes were acknowledged to be great poetry, full of vision and passion, a product not only of the senses but of the heart and brain as well.

On the appearance of Meredith's later volumes of verse, the cry of 'obscurity' seems to run through the reviews like an increasingly monotonous refrain. The critics blamed his 'intellectual passion for words'; his 'cursed Celtic love of fine language' and 'Celtic impetuosity'; in short, they decided, he suffered from 'the curse of too much ability'.^{x4} "Convolute thought; rapid force, zig-zaging with lightning swiftness and abruptness," wrote the Academy reviewer,^{x5} "magnetic and

x1 The Athenaeum, June 11, 1887, p. 759.

x2 The Academy, April 9, 1898, p. 397.

x3 The Times Literary Supplement, Nov. 28, 1918.

x4 The Saturday Review: July 13, 1901, by Arthur Symonds.

x5 The Academy, June 29, 1901, pp. 547-8.

quivering to the finger-tips with that super-subtilised emotional vitality we call poetry; spinning images into the air like coin, with an audacious joy in watching how they will come down - such is Meredith the poet".

In Meredith's work, and more particularly in his poetry, his merits and his defects go hand in hand, for his weaknesses are due to the over-development of his finest qualities. His originality and his intellectual power led to eccentricity and obscurity, his love of picturesque expression led to grotesqueness; and, as his critics declared, the philosopher destroyed the poet, for Meredith's preoccupation with abstract ideas led to neglect of the rhythmic qualities demanded for authentic poetry.

When his first volume appeared the critics remarked on the friendliness and sincerity of the young poet; but suggested that in general conception his work belonged to the class of 'minor poetry'^{x1}; they hinted, too, that he was sentimental and emotional. In criticising the 1883 "Poems and Lyrics," they made the more serious charge of diffuseness, 'the beating out of a small particle of metal into thin foil' which made some of his pieces, as a result, 'vague and rather featureless.'^{x2} Meredith was never able to exclude these faults entirely from his poetry, but in attempting to do so, he developed other and more serious defects. The abandonment to sensuous rapture in his early work, comparable only to that found in Swinburne, was sternly repressed in his mature verse, so that later critics complained of a certain coldness. All great poetry is marked by a feeling of human warmth and sympathy, a sense of tears, and it is this quality which they felt to be so conspicuously lacking in Meredith's work. Writing in the Academy^{x3} in 1897, a reviewer compared Shelley's "Skylark" with Meredith's "Lark Ascending," deciding that Shelley's poem was the more genuine as it was touched by sadness of heart, Meredith's by sadness of mind.

x1 The Athenaeum, Aug. 23, 1851, p. 395.

x2 The Academy, July 21, 1883, pp. 37-8, by Mark Pattison.

x3 The Academy, October 2, 1897, pp. 253-4.

Meredith did not allow himself to express emotion until it had passed the censorship of his mind, and it was this which gave to his poetry a certain impersonal quality of frigid intellectuality which kept the reader at a distance.

Probably in an attempt to conceal the defect of diffuseness, or perhaps as a natural development of this fault, Meredith fell into further excesses. In the act of 'packing a line' with thought he became an expert, and his later poetry was "a splendid and perplexing welter of metaphor and imagery... a kind of imaginative logic".^{x1} A serious complaint was that there was no advance in his themes; instead his habit was to take an idea, and express it in a dozen different metaphors, each vivid and arresting in itself: "We compare Mr. Meredith,"^{x2} stated a critic in the Literary World, "when he keeps on adding paraphrase to paraphrase, instead of allowing his theme to develop, to a juggler manipulating half-a-dozen golden balls at the same time. The juggler often gives us too much of his clever trick; so does Mr. Meredith." It seemed that the poet was quite unable to express himself simply and greatly; instead he had allowed his peculiarities of style to grow upon him until he had lost his sense of due proportion and balance,^{x3} so that "his very scavenger-boys run about in cloth of gold". The critics complained that Meredith played tricks with his genius, and by his violent search for extraordinary ways of expressing his meaning, he created a form of writing "filled with so many evidences of admirable observation and glowing fancy, and so elevated in temper and so brilliant with intellectual vitality that we cannot forgive them for not being better still, for not - to be curt - being really in the true sense poetry at all."^{x4}

Not only was there a lack of that great simplicity which characterises the highest verse, but there was also a

x1 The Athenaeum, July 20, 1901, pp. 81-2.

x2 The Literary World, Nov. 5, 1897, p. 360.

x3 The Saturday Review, Nov. 12, 1898, pp. 644-5.

x4 The Saturday Review, October 9, 1897, pp. 393-5.

lack of restfulness in his work. By keeping the attention of his readers "needlessly and harassingly on the stretch",^{x1} they were given no leisure to enjoy the poetry. The dominant impression given by the reviews of Meredith's later work, was that the reading of the poems had been a labour and a torment, reducing his critics to a bewildered state where sincere admiration and acute mental distress vied for mastery. One reviewer, writing in "Literature"^{x2} declared that "The purely intellectual part of him has mastered the emotional part and the foaming torrent of his vocabulary has submerged both. In this cataclysm it is not only simplicity which has been swept away, but beauty also, even the mere form of poetry itself".

Meredith's poetry, they decided, depended for its effect on elements that were not poetical. All great poetry gives the impression of having been written under an overpowering influence, but in Meredith's work there was no 'inevitability', no 'copious flow of music', no 'impulsiveness'. The true poet is born, but Meredith had by determination and with agonies made himself a poet; as a result we are conscious of a sense of strain in his work.^{x3} He was a poet under his own compulsion, and his composition is directed not by poetic instinct, but by his intellect and his will. It was felt that the thinker, critic, satirist, historian and philosopher "were disputing on equal terms with the poet"; and the result was not poetry but "a beautiful artifice, exquisite prose pressed into metre against its will, a miraculous product of ingenuity and pertinacity."^{x4}

The reviewers of the 1861 Poems noted that Meredith had experimented with a wide variety of verse forms in none of which he had been completely successful. They felt that he had a good ear for melody, and a command of rhythm, but in his anxiety to achieve novelty of metre, he wrote verses which were often clumsy and ill-expressed. Meredith had not realised, the critics

x1 The Academy, Junell, 1887, p.406, by J. M. Gray.

x2 Literature, Nov. 26, 1898.

x3 The Saturday Review, October 9, 1897, pp. 393-5.

x4 The Saturday Review, Oct. 9, 1897, pp. 393-5.

complained, that the idyllist and lyricist must achieve metrical and harmonious perfection if he is to succeed at all; his work was wanting in polish and finish, because, they said, he had not mastered the technical difficulties and the metrical delicacies of poetic art.

When the "Poems and Lyrics" of 1883 appeared, the critics complained of Meredith's strange inequality. They found many instances of lines of pure poetry, followed by lines^{x1} "which strike upon the ear like flints", harsh and rugged, and metrically unsound. They were able to quote extracts, even whole poems, which were exquisitely melodious; but were almost unanimous in deciding that Meredith was "not a musical poet".^{x2} 'Love in the Valley', 'The Lark Ascending', the superb 'Hymn to Colour', the long Ode 'France, 1870', and the classic couplet:

"Maiden still the morn is; and strange she is, and secret;
Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells -"

were some of the examples chosen to show that he could, at times,^{x3} be gloriously musical. More often, however, he "hammered out his rhymes on the anvil",^{x4} each line was a separate sentence, and he achieved his emphasis by a type of "vivid monotony". In all his later work, his readers complained that his metres were often so harsh and crabbed that he achieved not poetry but "a kind of quintessential prose",^{x1} in which they felt that they were watching 'a duel to the death between Mr. Meredith and the metre'.^{x5} Oscar Wilde in his "Intentions" had much the same fault to find with Meredith's poetry, but he expressed it more succinctly: "Meredith is a prose Browning...and so is Browning!"

The critics are always anxious to assign a new poet to some particular school, and to trace the modelling influence of other poets. When Meredith published his first volume of verse he was hailed as belonging to the Keatsian school,^{x6}

x1 The Athenaeum, July 28, pp. 103-4 by T. Watts-Dunton.

x2 The Spectator, Dec. 7, 1912, pp. 931-2.

x3 Love in a Valley.

x4 The Athenaeum, July 20, 1901, pp. 81-2

x5 The Literary World, Nov. 5, 1897, p. 360.

x6 The Athenaeum, Aug. 23, 1851, p. 395.

because he was 'a seeing or sensuous poet', and possessed a 'simple enjoying nature'. There were Keatsian words in his poems such as 'bloomy' and 'seemingness', and a voluptuousness of treatment, as for instance in 'Daphne', which was reminiscent of Keats. He had, moreover, Keats's fault of 'over-muchness' resulting in a lack of proportion and scientific unity, but he was a 'limited Keats' because he did not show the same complete abandonment to a mood of sensuous languor which we find in the work of the earlier poet. The Spectator^{x1} critic, being more circumspect, decided that in fairness, he could not definitely declare Meredith to be a disciple and follower of Keats, as the similarity to Keats was probably assignable to the prevailing literary fashion of the day. Meredith's poetry was admittedly superior they found in force and vitality.

In the 'mellifluous early lyrics' the reviewers discovered the influence of Tennyson and the German poets, and a hint of Tennyson, too, in the pseudo-epic songs, such as "Idomeneus", which they thought not unlike Tennyson's classical imitations. William Michael Rossetti^{x2} detected a smack of Herrick in the 'quaintness' of some of the lyrics, such as the 'tricksey ditty' "Love within the Lover's breast". When these early poems were republished in 1910, a reviewer for the Athenaeum,^{x3} not to be outdone, decided that Blake was one of the strongest modelling influences in Meredith's youthful work: he found Blake's influence clearly on many pages of the pastorals, and as a conspicuous example, quoted the song,

"Lo! as a tree, whose wintry twigs
Drink in the sun with fibrous joy
.....

My soul shall own its parent in the founts of day!"

There is admittedly something of the same white radiance of mysticism suffused through the work of the two poets; but there the likeness ceases, for Blake's mysticism is a religious submission to the power of God, whereas Meredith's is founded

x1 The Spectator, July 5, 1851.

x2 The Critic, Nov. 15, 1851, pp. 539-40, by W. M. R.

x3 The Athenaeum, March 5, 1910, pp. 270-271.

on a glad atheistic acceptance of the natural laws of Earth.

The influence of Meredith's Pre-Raphaelite friends had been at its strongest during the years just prior to the publication of 'Modern Love', and was most conspicuous, therefore, in this volume and in the "Poems and Lyrics" of 1883. His art was at its most pictorial during this period; the 'Daughter of Hades' was a typical Burne-Jones maiden; and as Pattison^{x1} had pointed out, Meredith's interest in classic legendry was reminiscent of D. G. Rossetti's poetical reproductions of mediaeval legends and stories.

In the 'raucy workmanship' of the "Poems of the English Roadside" of 1862, both contemporary and later critics could trace the influence of Browning. The similarity moreover was not one of subject only; the poets were alike in their disregard of the niceties of metrical expression, their emphasis on matter and their neglect of manner. "Juggling Jerry" and "The Old Chartist" are Browningsque philosophers, and 'Modern Love' is reminiscent of Browning in the psychological probing into the hearts and minds of his characters. It was evident, by the new qualities in his 1862 volume, that Meredith had escaped the cloying and sensuous clutches of Keats and Tennyson, and had become, as the Saturday Review^{x2} phrased it, "the close and ardent disciple of Browning".^{x2}

By the time Meredith had published his next two volumes of poetry, the critics realised that he was 'a disciple' no longer. He had developed his own individual style, which at its best was admirable, and at its worst was infinitely exasperating. Though they still compared Meredith with other writers, this was done for the purpose of comparison only, and not with the suggestion that any of them had served him as models. In the "prophetic sternness" of the French Odes the reviewers found something akin to Milton; in the ardour of his

x1 The Academy, July 21, 1883, pp. 37-38 by Mark Pattison.

x2 The Saturday Review, Oct. 9, 1897, pp. 393-5.

nature worship they compared him to Wordsworth; for his vitality and exuberance they found parallels in the work of Byron and Shelley. But they decided that Meredith's style was original and essentially modern. Like Carlyle and Browning, who were the exponents of the new method of expression, Meredith's style, both in poetry and prose, was journalistic, and aimed at "flashing an immediate effect"^{x1} upon the consciousness of the reader. It was inevitable that his 'rebellious impressionism', his 'virile creativeness', his 'riotous vitality', would be discountenanced by the upholders of conservatism, and traditions of orderliness and restraint in art. One reviewer, a staunch admirer moreover, even coined a term for the poet's unconventional and picturesque mode of expression: 'Meredithyramics'.^{x2}

x1 The Forum, New York, April 1910, pp. 441-7, by Richard le Gallienne.

x2 Quoted by C.K.S. in The Illustrated London News, June 18, 1898, p. 896. (C.K. Shorter was Editor of this paper.)

A

SELECTION

OF CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS AND CRITICISMS.

NOTE:

On the title-page corresponding to each volume of poetry a complete list of all known reviews is given. Those which are reproduced verbatim in the sections following are indicated on the list by means of asterisks.

Not all the reviews were procurable for examination, and this has, to some extent, prescribed the field of selection. Apart from this consideration, those reviews have been selected which were considered to be most important or most representative of the general critical attitude.

POEMS.

May, 1851.

(From The Spectator, Saturday, July 5, 1851. The Critic's mention of Meredith's "glance" at social problems is of interest in the light of the violent abuse to which this paper was roused by the poet's next volume, "Modern Love".)

MEREDITH'S POEMS.

"This volume possesses considerable poetical feeling and poetical faculty, but displays more of promise than performance. Mr. Meredith has the characteristics of young or unstudied writers. His subjects are often too limited or common, and an attempt to impart attraction by treatment does not always succeed, the result being a curious quaintness rather than novelty. With the power of independent judgment and observation, Mr. Meredith falls too much into the ruts of a school, and, without very closely imitating any writer in particular, frequently reminds the reader of Tennyson or Keats, with occasional touches of the Brownings; though this manner is so common among poetical aspirants, that it may be as much a literary fashion as an individual imitation. Mr. Meredith has occasionally, too, a sensuous warmth of image and expression, which, though not passing propriety, might as well be tempered. With the exception of want of breadth and novelty in the subjects, these things, though they may injure the style or lower the class, can hardly be said to impair the interest of the poems. Mr. Meredith's greatest fault is overdoing: he rarely knows when he has said enough: besides continually over-laying his ideas by expansion, he introduces similes not always the aptest, and in addition to making them more prominent than the principal idea, runs them on till they become a new subject. This fault would detract from the interest of any composition; but it admits of an easy remedy. If Mr. Meredith intends to cultivate poetry, this over-exuberance must be steadily repressed. For example, "The Sleeping City" consists of twenty-nine stanzas, fourteen of which are devoted to the Eastern Princess in the city whose inhabitants were turned to stone; a mere illustrative image being nearly as long as the incident itself. It may seem that there is something

* Poems. By George Meredith. Published by Parker and Son.

of the spirit of Sterne's stop-watch in this; but, to borrow a remark from Sir Fretful Plagiary, "the watch on these occasions, you know, is the critic."

The poems are mostly of the kind called occasional; consisting of everyday incidents, or themes suggested by some object common to every observation. These are occasionally varied by classical subjects running into a short tale, - as the metamorphosis of Daphne, or the shipwreck of Idomeneus. In most of them there is poetical imagery, feeling, and diction; the last if not altogether original yet unhacknied, with frequent felicity of idea or phraseology, though sometimes of an odd kind. Description is perhaps Mr. Meredith's strongest point; but he has also looked upon society and the questions which now agitate it. This glance may not have produced absolute originality, but it has saved him from the common-places of poetasters. The following stanzas are from a poem called "The Olive Branch", - the name of a vessel thus christened because a dove dropped an olive sprig upon it at the moment^{of} launching.

"Come, read the meaning of the deep!
The use of winds and waters learn!-
'Tis not to make the mother weep
For sons that never will return;

"'Tis not to make the nations show
Contempt for all whom seas divide;
'Tis not to pamper war and wo,
Nor feed traditionary pride;

"'Tis not to make the floating bulk
Mask death upon its slippery deck,
Itself in turn a shatter'd hulk,
A ghastly raft, a bleeding wreck;

"It is to knit with loving lip
The interests of land to land;
To join in far-seen fellowship
The Tropic and the Polar strand.

"It is to make that foaming Strength,
Whose rebel forces wrestle still
Through all his boundaried breadth and length,
Become a vassal to our will.

"It is to make the various skies,
And all the various fruits they vaunt,
And all the dowers of earth we prize,
Subservient to our household want."

"London by Lamplight" touches a subject on which many other pens are also employed - the condition of the poor of large towns, and the extent of prostitution: but it is real, important, and too instant to be stale.

"There stands a singer in the street,
He has an audience motley and meet;
Above him lowers the London night,
And around the lamps are flaring bright.

"His minstrelsy may be unhaste -
'Tis much unto that motley taste,
And loud the laughter he provokes
From those sad slaves of obscene jokes.

"But wo is many a passer by,
Who as he goes turns half an eye
To see the human form divine
Thus Circe-wise changed into swine!

"Make up the sum of either sex
That all our human hopes perplex,
With those unhappy shapes that know
The silent streets and pale cock-crow.

"And can I trace in such dull eyes
Of fireside peace or country skies?
And could those haggard cheeks presume
To memories of a May-tide bloom?

"Those violated forms have been
The pride of many a flowering green;
And still the virgin bosom heaves
With daisy meads and dewy leaves.

"But Stygian darkness reigns within,
The river of death from the founts of sin;
And one prophetic water rolls
Its gas-lit surface for their souls.

"I will not hide the tragic sight -
Those drowned black locks, those dead lips white,
Will rise from out the slimy flood,
And cry before God's throne for blood!

"Those stiffened limbs, that swollen face
Pollution's last and best embrace,
Will call as such a picture can
For retribution upon man."

Many passages of rare and some of quaint description will be found in the volume. We take one that exhibits the peculiarity by which Mr. Meredith attempts to invest common subjects with a novelty they would not otherwise possess.

"THE DEATH OF WINTER.

"When April with her wild blue eye
Comes dancing over the grass,
And all the crimson buds so shy
Peep out to see her pass;
As lightly she loosens her showery locks,
And flutters her rainy wings;
Laughingly stoops
To the glass of the stream
And loosens and loops
Her hair by the gleam;
While all the young villagers blithe as the flocks
Go frolicking round in rings;
Then Winter, he who tamed the fly,
Turns on his back and prepares to die,
For he cannot live longer under the sky.
Down the valleys glittering green,
Down from the hills in snowy rills,
He melts between the border sheen
And leaps the flowery verges.
He cannot choose, but brighten their hues,
And though he would creep, he fain must leap,
For the quick spring spirit urges.
Down the vale and down the dale,
He leaps and lights, till his moments fail,
Buried in blossoms, red and pale,
While the sweet birds sing his dirges.
O Winter! I'd live that life of thine,
With a frosty brow and an icicle tongue,
And never a song my whole life long,
Were such delicious burial mine!
To die and be buried, and so remain
A wandering brook in April's train,
Fixing my dying eyes for aye
On the dawning brows of maiden May."

P O E M S.

May, 1851.

(From The Athenaeum: Aug. 23, 1851 p.395. Anonymous. This periodical had a reputation for discretion rather than enthusiasm where the works of new authors were concerned. The general tone of "faint praise", and the anxiety to preserve a nice balance between eulogy and censure without being unduly discouraging to the "'prentice" poet are the chief features of this curiously non-committal review.)

'From the mass of volumes of verse which load our table, we select one that deserves a somewhat better introduction to our readers than could be given under our accustomed title of "Poetry of the Million".

It would seem that the class of "singers" is on the increase. The Singer is distinguished from the Poet much in the same manner as aptitude is from genius. The poet is a fully developed spirit, uniting to a wide experience a philosophical judgment and the qualifications of an artist in verse. The "singer" simply requires an instinct for song and a desire to use the gift on exciting occasions. The form is accordingly, for the most part, lyrical, and the matter frequently personal. The turn of a phrase, a delicate cadence, some grace of diction or tenderness of sentiment will suffice as a distinguishing merit, and establish the claim of the minor minstrel, whose themes are generally as fugitive as his flight is brief.

Mr. Meredith is to a certain extent a writer of the class indicated, - but he may even claim to be something more. His small volume contains some essays with an epic ambition in their aim not unlike the classic imitations of Tennyson. 'Daphne', 'Antigone' and 'The Shipwreck of Idomeneus' are the titles and themes of such attempts. These are not without poetic fervour. They show a fair acquaintance with Greek models, and a power of verbal combination of considerable "mark and likelihood". Occasional negligences betray his want of mastery. Thus, in the lyrical poems, some of which might almost be called beautiful, we meet at times with stanzas

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that are quite prosaic in feeling and in diction. Many of the pieces, too, are set exercises - such as the leading poem of the series, entitled 'The Olive Branch'. This is the name of a ship, - and the moral is this:-

"On strengthened wing
..... man to man
And like that fair
.....
and every ship an Olive Branch".

This mere theme writing is the fault of the volume, and betrays the young writer. But his "juvenilia", if such they be, are of positive merit, - and of more promise. Take the following tricky ditty. -

"Love within the lover's breast
(3 stanzas quoted to) "Ever shall I sing of thee".

This, in fact, is merely pretty:- yet it has a smack of Herrick in it. The example is not a sound one:- and we counsel Mr. Meredith not to let the spell of the old erotic poet lead him into paths where the master himself found more weeds than flowers, - and whose flowers, even as culled and bound by Herrick, look pale beside those that grow in the atmosphere of nobler thought.

As a quaint example of Mr. Meredith's poems, take the following:-

"Will o' the Wisp"

Follow me, follow me	[whole poem quoted
Follow me, follow me,	
Where he sits, and you shall see".	

It is not always, however, that the author is so elaborate in his verbal and rythmical displays. One more example must suffice our readers, to enable them to determine on Mr. Meredith's chance to keep his permanent station without the poetical playgrounds of "The Million". -

The Death of Winter.

"When April with her wild blue eye.

(3 stanzas to-)

On the dawning brows of maiden May."

It will be said, no doubt, that these are small beauties, - and even as such are chargeable with affectation. We fear that the objections must be allowed, - and in an older writer they would have determined our verdict in a harsher sense. But where the "'prentice-hand" is so manifest as in this volume, we accept the signs of care and intention which it exhibits as indications of an artistic tendency in the "singer", and to a certain extent as pledges that one day he may become a poet."

(From The Critic: Vol. X No. 255 pp. 539 - 540, Nov. 15, 1851, initialled W.M.R. (William Michael Rossetti), brother of the poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti.)

"The full poet is a thoroughly balanced compound of perception and intellect. By the first faculty he sees vividly, and feels to the inmost; by the second, he understands deeply and largely, and applies with a subtle searching breadth. The power of expression is a correlative of both; but it belongs more immediately to the first. Though Tennyson had not been the Author in posse of "In Memoriam", he might equally have produced such perfect word-painting as we find in "Mariana"; but a want of that perception which constitutes the essence of the latter would have made the former more faint from first to last.

Of the perceptive poet we have no other such complete example as Keats. It is the delight in what he sees, the sympathy with what he narrates, that endows him with his marvellous power of expression. To him everything was an opportunity. Yet he saw nature and emotion as rather suggestive than typical; as exciting the thoughts outwards, not leading them inwards. His poems have but little of the unconscious simile, (to be found so largely in those of Tennyson for instance), the implication in description of an inner essence and ulterior meaning. Keats portrays his object with keen, exquisite picturing, but which aims only at the phenomenal fact; or else he makes use of the simile direct. His enthusiasm was less an inner fire than a visible lambent halo. He saw loveliness in nature, or found it the incentive to lovely

thoughts/

thoughts. He rested in the effect. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

Mr. Meredith seems to us a kind of limited Keats. He is scarcely a perceptive, but rather a seeing or sensuous poet. He does not love nature in a wide sense as Keats did; but Nature delights and appeals closely to him. In proportion, however, as his sympathies are less vivid, excitable, and diffusive, he concentrates them the more. He appropriates a section of nature, as it were; and the love which he bears to it partakes more of affection. Viewing Mr. Meredith as a Keatsian, and allowing for (what we need not stop to assert) the entire superiority of the dead poet, we think it is in this point that the most essential phase of difference will be found between the two; and it is one which, were the resemblance in other respects more marked and more unmixed than it is, would suffice to divide Mr. Meredith from the imitating class. The love of Keats for Nature was not an affectionate love: it was minute, searching, and ardent, but hardly personal. He does not lose himself in nature, but contemplates her and utters he forth to the delight of all ages.* Indeed, if we read his record aright, he was not, either in thought or in feeling, a strongly affectionate man; and the passion which ate into him at the last was a mania and infatuation, raging like disease, a symptom and a part of it. It is otherwise with Mr. Meredith. In his best moments he seems to sing because it comes naturally to him and silence would be restraint, not through exuberance or inspiration, but in simple contentedness, or throbbing of heart. There is an amiable and engaging quality in the poems of Mr. Meredith, a human companionship and openness, which make the reader feel his friend. But, perhaps, it is chiefly in the impressions of love that

*We hope it is superfluous to explain that, in what is here said of Keats, we seek only to discriminate, not to depreciate; and that we love and reverence him as one of the most glorious of poets. W.M.R.

our new poet's likeness and unlikeness at once to the author of "Endymion" and "Lamia" are to be recognised. We are told that women felt pique at Keats for treating them in his verses scarcely otherwise than flowers or perfumes; as beautifiers and the object of tender and pleasurable emotion, - a charm of life. They missed the language of individual love, dignified and equal. Nor was the quarrel without a cause; but the reader will probably, at the first reading of the very charming, melodious, and rhythmical poem which we proceed to quote, think us unfair in trying to fasten it on Mr. Meredith.

LOVE IN THE VALLEY.

(quoted in full as on p.573-5 of The Poetical Works ... Trevelyan edition).

.....

Surely, it may be said, there is passion enough here, and of a sufficiently personal kind. True, indeed: this is not a devotion which sins through lukewarmth, and roams uncertain of an object. It will not fail to obtain an answer, through dubiousness of quest: and if it shocks at all, it shocks the delicacy not the amour-propre. But its characteristics are, in fact, the same as those at which exception was taken in the case of Keats. The flame burns here, which there only played, darting its thin, quick tongue from point to point; but the difference is of concentration only. The impressionable is changed for the strongly impressed - the influence being similar. Here again the love, like our poet's love of nature, has the distinct tone of affection. It is purely and unaffectedly sensuous, and in its utterance as genuine a thing as can be. We hear a clear voice of nature, with no falsetto notes at all; as spontaneous and intelligible as the wooing of a bird, and equally a matter of course.

The main quality of Mr. Meredith's poems is warmth - warmth of emotion, and, to a certain extent, of imagination, like the rich mantling blush on a beautiful face, or a breath glowing upon your cheek. That he is young will be as unmistakably apparent to the reader as to ourself; on which score various shortcomings and

crudities, not less than some excess of this attribute, claim indulgence. The "Rape of Aurora", for example, is certainly too highly coloured; "Daphne" objectionably spun out, even if but in regard to length; and "Angelic Love" other than angelic. The following, against which this plea cannot be urged, is a graceful and fitting companion to "Love in the Valley".

SONG.

"Under boughs of breathing May, "

..... quoted in full as on p. 46 of Poetical Works.)

Our last quotation displays Mr. Meredith in one of his more exclusively descriptive pieces. But we may observe that, here too, the emotion is what most distinctly impresses itself, while the description proper, though not wanting in precision and minuteness, looms somewhat faintly.

SONG.

"The daisy now is out upon the green;

..... quoted in full as on p. 77 of Poetical Works.)

We have assigned Mr. Meredith to the Keatsian school, believing that he pertains to it in virtue of the more intrinsic qualities of his mind, and of a simple enjoying nature; and as being beyond doubt of the perceptive class in poetry. In mere style, however, he attaches himself rather to the poets of the day: the pieces in which a particular bias is most evident being in a Tennysonian mould - as the "Olive Branch", and the "Shipwreck of Idomeneus", - while some of his smaller lyrics smack of Herrick. He has a good ear for melody, and considerable command of rhythm; but he seems sometimes to hanker unduly after novelty of metre, attaining it, if there be no other means to his hand, by some change in length or interruption of rhyme which has a dragging and inconsequent effect. That his volume is young is not his fault; nor are we by any means sure that it is its misfortune. Some jingle - pieces there are, indeed, - mere commonplace and current convention, which mature judgment would exclude: but the best are those whose spirit is the spirit of youth,

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and which are the fullest of it. We do not expect ever quite to enrol Mr. Meredith among the demigods or heroes; and we hesitate, for the reason just given, to say that we count on greater things from him; but we shall not cease to look for his renewed appearance with hope, and to hail it with extreme pleasure, so long as he may continue to produce poems equal to the best in this first volume."

(This criticism by the then popular writer and poet Charles Kingsley is the best review of the volume. It occurs in an article entitled "This Year's Song-Crop", which appeared in Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, Vol. XLIV, No. CCLXIV, pp, 618 - 632, December, 1851. Mrs. Browning's "Casa Guidi Windows", "The Poems, Posthumous and Collected, of Thomas Lovell Beddoes", W. C. Roscoe's "Violencia", and "Poetry, Sacred and Profane", by John Wright, were also reviewed in this article.)

"Quite antipodal to the poems of Mr. Beddoes, and yet, in our eyes, fresh proof of the truth of those rules which we have tried to sketch, are the poems of Mr. George Meredith. This, we understand, is his first appearance in print; if it be so, there is very high promise in the unambitious little volume which he has sent forth as his first fruits. It is something, to have written already some of the most delicious little love-poems which we have seen born in England in the last few years, reminding us by their richness and quaintness of tone of Herrick; yet with a depth of thought and feeling which Herrick never reached. Health and sweetness are two qualities which run through all these poems. They are often overloaded - often somewhat clumsy and ill-expressed - often wanting polish and finish; but they are all genuine, all melodiously conceived, if not always melodiously executed. One often wishes, in reading the volume, that Mr. Meredith had been thinking now and then of Moore instead of Keats, and had kept for revision a great deal which he has published; yet now and then form, as well as matter, is nearly perfect. For instance:-

SONG.

"The moon is alone in the sky

as on page 9, "Poetical Works"

SONG.

"I cannot lose thee for a day,

..... as on page 29 (whole poem quoted)

In Mr. Meredith's Pastorals, too, there is a great deal of sweet wholesome writing, more like real pastorals than those of any young poet whom we have had for many a year. Let these suffice as specimens:-

" See, on the river the slow-rippled surface

shining; as on p. 54

to tho' day is now buried."

Careless as hexameters; but honest landscape-painting; and only he who begins honestly ends greatly.

LOVE IN THE VALLEY.

(Stanzas 1, 2, 4 as on p. 573.)

What gives us here hope for the future, as well as enjoyment on the spot, is, that these have evidently not been put together, but have grown of themselves; and the one idea has risen before his mind, and shaped itself into a song; not perfect in form, perhaps, but as far as it goes, healthful, and consistent, and living, through every branch and spray of detail. And this is the reason why Mr. Meredith has so soon acquired an instinctive melody, which Mr. Beddoes, as we saw, never could. To such a man, any light which he can gain from aesthetic science will be altogether useful. The living seed of a poem being in him, and certain to grow and develop somehow, the whole gardener's art may be successfully brought to bear on perfecting it. For this is the use of aesthetic science - to supply, not the bricklayer's trowel, but the hoe, which increases the fertility of the soil, and the pruning-knife, which lops off excrescences. For Mr. Meredith - with real kindness we say it, for the sake of those love-poems - has much to learn, and, as it seems to us, a spirit which can learn it; but still it must be learnt. One charming poem - for instance, "Daphne" - is all spoilt, for want of that same pruning-knife. We put aside the question whether a ballad form is suitable,

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not to the subject - for to that, as a case of purely objective action, it is suitable, - but to his half-Elegiac, thoughtful handling of it. Yet we recommend him to consider whether his way of looking at the Apollo and Daphne myth be not so far identical with Mr. Tennyson's idea of "Paris and Oenone", as to require a similar Idyllic form, to give the thoughtful element its fair weight. If you treat external action merely (and in as far as you do so, you will really reproduce those old sensuous myths) you may keep the ballad form and heap verse on verse as rapidly as you will; but if you introduce any subjective thought, after the fashion of the Roman and later Greek writers, to explain the myth, and give it a spiritual, or even merely allegoric meaning, you must, as they did, slacken the pace of your verse. Let Ovid's Fasti and Epistles be your examples, at least in form, and write slowly enough to allow the reader to think as he goes on. The neglect of this rule spoilt the two best poems in Reverberations, "Balder" and "Thor", which, whatever were the faults of the rest of the book, were true^{and} noble poems; and the neglect of it spoils "Apollo and Daphne". Mr. Meredith is trying all through to mean more than the form which he has chosen allows him. That form gives free scope to a prodigality of objective description, of which Keats need not have been ashamed; but if he had more carefully studied the old models of that form - from the simple Scotch ballads to Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" - a ballad and not an idyl, - he would have avoided Keats' fault of too-muchness, into which he has fallen. Half the poem would bear cutting out; even half of those most fresh and living stanzas, where the whole woodland springs into life to stop Daphne's flight - where

"Running ivies, dark and lingering,
Round her light limbs drag and twine;
Round her waist, with languorous tendrils
Reels and wreathes the juicy vine,
Crowning her with amorous clusters;
Pouring down her sloping back
Fresh-born wines in glittering rilllets,
Following her in crimson track".

every

Every stanza is a picture in itself, but there are too many of them; and therefore we lose the story in the profusion of its accidentals. There is a truly Correggionesque tone of feeling and drawing, all through this poem which is very pleasant to us. But we pray Mr. Meredith to go to the National Gallery, and there look steadily and long, with all the analytic insight he can, at the "Venus and Mercury", of the "Agony in the Garden" or go to the Egyptian Hall, and there feast, not only his eyes and heart, but his intellect and spirit also, with Lord Ward's duplicate of the "Magdalen" - the grandest Protestant sermon on "free justification by faith" ever yet preached; and there see how Correggio can dare to indulge in his exquisite lusciousness of form, colour, and chiaro-'scuro, without his pictures ever becoming tawdry or overwrought - namely, by the severe scientific unity and harmonious gradation of parts which he so carefully preserves, which make his pictures single glorious rainbows of precious stone - that Magdalen one living emerald - instead of being, like the jewelled hawk in the Great Exhibition, every separate atom of it beautiful, yet as a whole utterly hideous.

One or two more little quarrels we have with Mr. Meredith, - and yet they are but amantium irae, after all. First, concerning certain Keatist words - such as Languorous, and innumerable, and such like, which are very melodious, but do not, unfortunately, belong to this our English tongue, their places being occupied already by old and established words; as Mr. Tennyson has conquered this fault in himself, Mr. Meredith must do the same. Next, concerning certain ambitious metres, sound and sweet, but not thoroughly worked out, as they should have been. Mr. Meredith must always keep in mind that the species of poetry which he has chosen is one which admits of nothing less than perfection. We may excuse the roughness of Mrs. Browning's utterance, for the sake of the grandeur and earnestness of her purpose; she may be reasonably supposed to have been more engrossed with the matter than with the manner. But it is not so

with/

with the idyllist and lyricist. He is not driven to speak by a prophetic impulse; he sings of pure will, and therefore he must sing perfectly, and take a hint from that microcosm, the hunting-field; wherein if the hounds are running hard, it is no shame to any man to smash a gate instead of clearing it, and jump into a brook instead of over it. Forward he must get, by fair means if possible, if not, by foul. But if, like the idyllist, any gentleman "larks" his horse over supererogatory leaps at the cover-side, he is not allowed to knock all four hoofs against the top bar; but public opinion (who, donkey as she is, is a very shrewd old donkey, nevertheless, and clearly understands the difference between thistles and barley) requires him to "come up in good form, measure his distance exactly, take off neatly, clear it cleverly, and come well into the next field" And even so should idyllists with their metres."

MODERN LOVE
 AND
 POEMS OF THE ENGLISH ROADSIDE
 WITH POEMS AND BALLADS.
 BY
 GEORGE MEREDITH.
 1862.

MODERN LOVE
 a Reprint
 To which is added
 THE SAGE ENAMoured AND THE HONEST LADY.
 BY
 GEORGE MEREDITH
 1892.

Reviews:

- The Critic, May 17, 1862 p. 487.
 The Parthenon, May 17, 1862 pp. 71-2 by J. C. Morison and
 N. E. S. A. Hamilton.
 * The Spectator, May 24, 1862 pp. 580-1.
 * and reply by A. C. Swinburne, June 7, 1862, pp. 632-3.
 * The Athenaeum, May 31, 1862 pp. 719-20.
 * The Morning Post, June 20, 1862, p.6, by Captain Frederick Maxse.
 * The Westminster Review, July 1862 p. 284.
 * The Saturday Review, October 24, 1863, pp. 562-3.
 Retrospective Reviews by Richard le Gallienne, London 1896
 Vol. 1 pp. 28-36 dated February, 1892.

MODERN LOVE
AND
POEMS OF THE ENGLISH ROADSIDE,
WITH POEMS AND BALLADS.
1862.

(From The Spectator, May 24, 1862, pp. 580-581.
Judge Hardman who was with Meredith when the poet read
this review, has told us that Meredith was "stung and
flushed", and declared that on account of its vindictiveness,
he felt certain that it had been written by a woman!)

MR. GEORGE MEREDITH'S "MODERN LOVE".

"Clever bold men with any literary capacity are always tempted to write verse, as they can say so much under its artistic cover which in common prose they could not say at all. It is a false impulse, however, for unless the form of verse is really that in which it is most natural for them to write, the effect of adopting it is to make the sharp hits which would be natural in prose, look out of place - lugged in by head and shoulders - and the audacity exceedingly repellent. This is certainly the effect upon us of this volume of verse. Mr. George Meredith is a clever man, without literary genius, taste, or judgment, and apparently aims at that sort of union of point, passion, and pictorial audacity which Byron attained in "Don Juan". There is, however, no kind of harmonious concord between his ideas and his expressions; when he is smart, as he is habitually, the form of versification makes the smartness look still more vulgar, and the jocularity jar far more than it would in prose. On the whole the effect of the book on us is that of clever, meretricious, turbid pictures, by a man of some vigour, jaunty manners, quick observation, and some pictorial skill, who likes writing about naked human passions, but does not bring either original imaginative power or true sentiment to the task. The chief composition in the book, absurdly called Modern Love, is a series of sonnets intended to versify the leading conception of Goethe's "Elective affinities". Mr. Meredith effects this with occasional vigour, but without any vestige of original thought or purpose which could excuse so unpleasant a subject, and intersperses it,

moreover, with sardonic grins that have all the effect of an intentional affectation of cynicism. This is not quite always the case, however, or we should soon throw the book contemptuously aside; for the jocularities are intolerably feeble and vulgar. The best, or one of the best sonnets, describes the concealed tragedy of social life when the hero (if he is to be so called) with his wife and the lady for whom he has since formed a passion are walking on the terrace before dinner with a brilliant party:

"Along the garden terrace under which
A purple valley (lighted at its edge
By smoky torch-flame on the long cloud-ledge
Whereunder dropp'd the chariot), glimmers rich,
A quiet company we pace, and wait
The dinner-bell in pre-digestive calm.
So sweet up violet banks the Southern balm
Breathes round, we care not if the bell be late:
Tho' here and there gray seniors question Time
In irritable coughings. With slow foot
The low, rosed moon, the face of Music mute,
Begins among her silent bars to climb.
As in and out, in silvery dusk, we thread,
I hear the laugh of Madam, and discern
My Lady's heel before me at each turn.
Our Tragedy, is it alive or dead?"

There is considerable vividness in this description, especially of the "grey seniors" who "question Time in irritable coughings," but the intended poetry is meretricious; no one who feels truly can help feeling that to speak of "the low, rosed moon" as "the face of Music mute," is a snatch at the glitter and varnish of apparent, not real poetry. There is no analogy, subtle or otherwise, between the round simplicity of the moon's face and the spirit of music, which always involves the unity of melodious variety. A true poet has said,

"Slow, slow, fall
With indecisive motion eddying down,
The white-winged flakes, calm as the sleep of sound,
Dim as a dream;"

and this is beautiful, for it really translates the language of hearing into the language of sight. But to speak of the moon as "face of Music mute", appeals to no subtle analogy at all, and is a mere, unmeaning eulogium on that admirable planet. Such a criticism is doubtless small, - but in these minute touches lies the true distinction between a poet and one

"Who hides with ornament his want of Art."

Mr. George Meredith has a sense of what is graphic, but he never makes an excursion beyond that into what he intends for poetry without falling into some trick of false ornamentation. For one more example we will take the most reflective of these sonnets, in which Mr. Meredith is teaching us how to learn from Nature not to attach ourselves irretrievably to any mortal thing. The idea is forcibly expressed till it is intended to rise into a sort of tragic climax at the end, when it soars into an absurd parody of Tennysonian metaphor that is a perfect specimen of the foolish-sublime:

"I play for Seasons; not Eternities!"
 Says Nature laughing on her way. 'So must
 All those whose stake is nothing more than dust!' And lo, she wins, and of her harmonies
 She is full sure! Upon her dying rose
 She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,
 Scarce any retrospection in her eye;
 For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,
 Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag; there, an urn.
 Pledged she herself to aught, 'twould mark her end!
 This lesson of our only visible friend,
 Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?
 Yes! yes; - but oh, our human rose is fair
 Surpassingly! Lose calmly Love's great bliss,
 When the renew'd forever of a kiss
 Sounds thro' the listless hurricane of hair!"

What is the "forever of a kiss?" Is Mr. Meredith trying to distinguish between "the transient" and "the permanent" in kisses, "das reine seyn" and "reine nichts" as the German sages say, and to single out the permanent element, that which expresses "the infinite." If this rash suggestion be at all near the mark, we are still painfully in the dark as to the force of the word "renewed". If the "renewed forever of a kiss" in any way refers to the renewal of this infinite element, as ordinary people would suppose, - why is this the moment when we are exhorted to "lose calmly love's great bliss"? If it be a leave-taking the force of the word "renewed" on this particular crisis is hid from us. And what are we to say of the last line? Surely the "sound" of a kiss is not the true poetic and permanent element therein? If there is a "forever" - an eternal element, - in these expressive symbolic actions at all, we submit that it is not in the sound, - that on the contrary the sound is an accidental and rather unfortunate adjunct and accident in them. And what can Mr. Meredith mean to suggest by speaking of them as sounding through a "listless hurricane of hair"? That which is heard through a hurricane

1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be addressed. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

[illegible][illegible]

"The Census and Statistics, and under the law,
have a right to the Census and Statistics, and
the law is clear and the law is clear."

[illegible]

1. The City of London, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844

When asked if she believed that he is the man,
she said she did not know for sure. She said she had
not had time to study all of the details of the case
and that she was not sure of the facts.

[illegible]

1. The company is a public company.
2. The company is a private company.
3. The company is a partnership.
4. The company is a sole proprietorship.

1. The first step in the process is to identify the problem or issue that needs to be addressed. This involves gathering information and understanding the context of the problem.

[illegible]

THEY ARE THE ONLY, FRIEND, TO THE ONLY
THE ONLY, THE ONLY, THE ONLY,
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MODERN LOVE,
and
POEMS OF THE ENGLISH ROADSIDE,
WITH POEMS AND BALLADS.
1862.

(The Spectator : June 7, 1862. No. 1771 pp. 632-633. This is Swinburne's reply to the harsh review of Modern Love in The Spectator of May 24, 1862. Swinburne was already at this time Meredith's firm friend and ardent admirer; and his praise is as fulsome as the original criticism was excessively severe.)

Mr. George Meredith's "Modern Love".

(Letter to the Editor.)

"Sir, - I cannot resist asking the favour of admission for my protest against the article on Mr. Meredith's last volume of poems in the Spectator of May 24th. That I personally have for the writings, whether verse or prose, of Mr. Meredith a most sincere and deep admiration is no doubt a matter of infinitely small moment. I wish only, in default of a better, to appeal seriously on general grounds against this sort of criticism as applied to one of the leaders of English literature. To any fair attack Mr. Meredith's books of course lie as much open as another man's; indeed, standing where he does, the very eminence of his post makes him perhaps more liable than a man of less well-earned fame to the periodical slings and arrows of publicity. Against such criticism no one would have a right to appeal, whether for his own work or for another's. But the writer of the article in question blinks at starting the fact that he is dealing with no unfledged pretender. Any work of a man who has won his spurs, and fought his way to a foremost place among the men of his time, must claim at least a grave consideration and respect. It would hardly be less absurd, in remarking on a poem by Mr. Meredith, to omit all reference to his previous work, and treat the present book as if its author had never tried his hand at such writing before, than to criticise the "Legende des Siecles", or (coming to a nearer instance) the "Idylls of the King", without taking into account the relative position of the great English or

the greater French poet. On such a tone of criticism as this any one who may chance to see or hear of it has a right to comment.

But even if the case were different, and the author were now at his starting point, such a review of such a book is surely out of date. Praise or blame should be thoughtful, serious, careful, when applied to a work of such subtle strength, such depth of delicate power, such passionate and various beauty, as the leading poem of Mr. Meredith's volume: in some points, as it seems to me (and in this opinion I know that I have weightier judgments than my own to back me) a poem above the aim and beyond the reach of any but its author. Mr. Meredith is one of the three or four poets now alive whose work, perfect or imperfect, is always as noble in design as it is often faultless in result. The present critic falls foul of him for dealing with "a deep and painful subject on which he has no conviction to express". There are pulpits enough for all preachers in prose; the business of verse-writing is hardly to express convictions; and if some poetry, not without merit of its kind, has at times dealt in dogmatic morality, it is all the worse and all the weaker for that. As to subject, it is too much to expect that all schools of poetry are to be for ever subordinate to the one just now so much in request with us, whose scope of sight is bounded by the nursery walls; that all Muses are to bow down before her who babbles, with lips yet warm from their pristine pap, after the dangling delights of a child's coral; and jingles with flaccid fingers one knows not whether a jester's or a baby's bells. We have not too many writers capable of duly handling a subject worth the serious interest of men. As to execution, take almost any sonnet at random out of the series, and let any man qualified to judge for himself of metre, choice of expression, and splendid language, decide on its claims. And, after all, the test will be unfair, except as regards metrical or pictorial merit; every section of this great progressive poem being connected with the other by links of the finest and most studied workmanship. Take,

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for example, that noble sonnet, beginning

"We saw the swallows gathering in the skies,"

a more perfect piece of writing no man alive has ever turned out; witness these three lines, the grandest perhaps, of the book:

"And in the largeness of the evening earth,
Our spirit grew as we walked side by side;
The hour became her husband, and my bride;"

but in transcription it must lose the colour and effect given it by its place in the series; the grave and tender beauty, which makes it at once a bridge and a resting-place between the admirable poems of passion it falls among. As specimens of pure power, and depth of imagination at once intricate and vigorous, take the two sonnets on a false passing reunion of wife and husband; the sonnet on the rose; that other beginning:

"I am not of those miserable males
Who sniff at vice, and daring not to snap,
Do therefore hope for heaven."

and again that earlier one:

"All other joys of life he strove to warm."

Of the shorter poems which give character to the book I have not space to speak here; and as the critic has omitted noticing the most valuable and important (such as the "Beggar's Soliloquy", and the "Old Chartist", equal to Beranger for completeness of effect and exquisite justice of style, but noticeable for a thorough dramatic insight, which Beranger missed through his personal passions and partialities), there is no present need to go into the matter. I ask you to admit this protest simply out of justice to the book in hand, believing as I do that it expresses the deliberate unbiassed opinion of a sufficient number of readers to warrant the insertion of it, and leaving to your consideration rather their claims to a fair hearing than those of the book's author to a revised judgment. A poet of Mr. Meredith's rank can no more be profited by the advocacy of his admirers than injured by the rash or partial attack of his critics.

A. C. SWINBURNE.

(The/

(From The Morning Post, Friday, June 20th., 1862, P.6. This review is of special interest as it was written by Captain Frederick Maxse, to whom Meredith had dedicated the volume in question.)

"All lovers of literature have long been aware that among the large group of authors now distinguishing the country, there is no more rising man than Mr. George Meredith; neither is it necessary with them, as it may be with the ordinary reader, to warn against the confusion of his name with that of Mr. Owen Meredith. George Meredith has been slow in acquiring his audience; but the audience once gained remember his last words and wait patiently for the next, their number steadily increasing and desertion not known among them. Excepting a small but remarkable volume of verse which appeared 10 years ago, his claim on the public has been purely as a prose writer, first in the "Shaving of Shagpat" where, in the license of Oriental romance, he gave legitimate proof of a brilliancy of imagination which he has since, however tempting the circumstances, sternly subdued to the requirements of art; secondly in the "Ordeal of Richard Feverel," perhaps somewhat too blunt in its truth, too indifferent in a better stuff to the mere velvet of morality, and injudiciously interrupted by the contents of a certain "Scrip of Proverbs", which, though original and striking by themselves, serve to trip the heels of most readers without obtaining the attention which is their due; yet, notwithstanding these drawbacks, a book wherein the real master seizes the mind with Carlyle-like fascination from the first page to the last, and niches one character, that of Adrian the stomach-philosopher, a permanent figure in memory; and, lastly, in "Evan Harrington", in which, the rapidity of work for weekly issue allowing no time for that vigorous condensation Mr. George Meredith has the rare strength to apply, the public received a better opportunity of learning the prolific conception and vast store of humour, pathos, and fancy he has so abundantly and unrestrictedly at command, and impressing both reader and critic with the richness yet reserved.

In the present instance it is a volume of poetry with which Mr. George Meredith favours us, dedicated to Captain-

Maxse, R.H. Hitherto it has been the poet writing prose; but if an author possess the power of being concrete with any sense of music, there can be no doubt but what his proper field is that of verse, as there can be none that it is the higher form of expression and the surer mode of influence. This, notwithstanding Mr. Misraeli's dissertation on the matter, and his dictum that it is time to have done with the "barbaric clash of rhyme" - a sentiment applying a preference for the diffuseness of little to the concentration of much, and of fatal encouragement to several voluminous writers, who would be so much improved were they occasionally to exercise themselves within the trammels of verse. It is a good sign when a writer returns to poetry after a due performance in prose; it shows an increase of power and a genuine vitality in the muse, in contradistinction to the mere lyrical exuberance of youth, which puts out at 19 the one thin volume of verse, and henceforth finds an easy exhaustion in prose. It is the later desire for the concentration of "thick coming fancies" away from prose that marks the true poet, and which with high satisfaction we find in George Meredith. Also, because poetry is so much worthier of the twofold nature perceivable in this author's writings, the "androgynal" nature which Coleridge has remarked as appertaining to great, but which more properly belongs to "poetical", minds, and which feminine intuition is indispensable to the poet, the two married natures combining largeness of sympathy with keenness of instinct. The volume now published is characterised by this qualification, and it is the more striking on account of the rugged force there is in the verse. There is a strength reactionary from the tenderness, a tenderness approved by the strength, and a creation arising from the two which, if taken up in any way but superficially, must permanently establish its author's reputation. But, alas! there is so much smooth and glib verse current that it is doubtful whether there is any very large public left with a sense of what is fine and subtle. The slightest obscurity or difficulty in a passage, though the passage

contain a true diamond, will intimidate those who have become accustomed to seize paste with avidity; and therefore, while George Meredith's poetry is appreciated by the few preserving their purity, it is doubtful whether it will become popular until these leaders have made it standard.

Still, while certain of the eventual acknowledgement of this writer's claim to repute, we may in common with other well-wishers desire that he would cast less ^{often} mantles of obscurity over some of his finest passages. It may be desirable perhaps, that all readers should equally enjoy cerebral exercise with poetic sympathy; but the combination of taste is not that of any large public, as Mr. Tennyson and Mr. Robert Browning both discovered, though but the former to profit by. It is not want of simplicity with which Mr. George Meredith can be charged as a rule, for it exists in the most frequent and homely manner; but apparently only spontaneously. There seems some obstinacy to adopt that high essential when the idea has once fallen in its first crude and vigorous obscurity.

The present publication opens with a ballad entitled "Grandfather Bridgeman" - stirring and bright as only an English brook can be, and equally strong and healthy under its passing cloud; after which comes the most important piece in the volume, a poem in 50 sonnets, entitled "Modern Love". The tale told is the hidden and inner tragedy of a false love which is flowing blackly beneath the semblance of a happy married life:-

"The strange low sobs that shook their common bed
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,
And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,
Dreadfully venomous to him. Then, as midnight makes
Her giant heart of memory and tears
Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat
Sleep's heavy measure, they from head to feet
Were moveless, looking through their dead black years,
By vain regret scrawl'd over the blank wall.

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It ended and the morrow brought the task:
Her eyes were guilty gates that let him in
By shutting all too jealous for their sin:
Each suck'd a secret, and each wore a mask.

.

"A star with lurid beams, she seem'd to crown
 The pit of infamy; and then again
 He feinted on his vengefulness, and strove
 To ape the magnanimity of love,
 And smote himself, a shuddering heap of pain."

As the husband's Palace of Love lies in mere shards at his feet, the fearfulness of passionate despair is divulged partly in its own cries, partly in the revealing stroke of the poet:-

"But where began the change; and what's my crime?
 The wretch condemn'd, who has not been arraign'd,
 Chafes at his sentence
 My crime is that, the puppet of a dream,
 I plotted to be worthy of the world.
 Oh, had I with my darling help'd to mince
 The facts of life, you still had seen me go
 With hindward feather and with forward foe,
 Her much adored delightful Fairy Prince!"

He invokes nature to solve the hideous paradox. There she is, leaning over human misery with the smile adamant, still

"The larks from running rings send showers:
 The golden foot of May is on the flowers,
 And friendly shadows dance upon her brow.
 What's this, when nature swears there is no change
 To challenge eyesight?"

And thus she answers:-

"*I play for seasons; not eternities!"
 Says nature laughing on her way.
 Upon her dying rose
 She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,
 Scarce any retrospection in her eye;
 For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,
 Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag; there an urn.
 Pledged she herself to aught, 'twould mark her end!"

From which, though he breaks off impetuously -

"Yes! Yes! but, oh, our human rose is fair
 Surpassingly. Lose calmly Love's great bliss,
 When the renew'd forever of a kiss
 Sounds through the listless hurricane of hair!"

and comes an exquisite sonnet of bereavement and loss:-

"In our old shipwreck'd days there was an hour
 When in the firelight steadily a-glow,
 Join'd slackly, we beheld the chasm grow
 Among the clicking coals. Our library bower
 That eve was left to us; and hush'd we sat
 As lovers to whom Time is whispering.
 From sudden-open'd doors we heard them sing;
 The nodding elders mix'd good wine with chat."

"Well knew we that life's greatest treasure lay
 With us, and of it was our talk. 'Ah! yes,
 Love dies' I said; I never thought it less.
 She yearn'd to me that sentence to unsay.
 Then when the fire domed blackening, I found
 Her cheek was salt against my kiss, and swift
 Up the sharp scale of sobs her breast did lift,
 How am I haunted by that taste, that sound!"

The poet here bares all the delicate agony of the large heart
 whose faith and stake were in the one love - whose fealty had
 been ever to the divine exaltation of the passion in contrast
 to its commoner abasement to animalism, but to which now trans-
 formed, subjugated to the flinty scepticism of the world -

"A kiss is but a kiss now, and no wave
 Of a great flood that whirls me to the sea.
 But as you will! we'll sit contentedly,
 And eat our pot of honey on the grave."

Shrouded in cynicism, his stupified nature observes a trench-
 ant irony to the wife, while at the same time indulging in a
 contemptuous appetite towards a certain "golden-headed" lady who
 is near. There is a skin of poetry even over his passage with
 her; he could notice how -

"With slow foot
 The low, rosed moon, the face of music mute,
 Begins among her silent bars to climb."

The course and conclusion of the two guilts, the deliberate
 and the deperate, are shadowed forth in "tragic hints", which,
 in conformity with the wreck of the two lives, permits of no
 consecutive sketch. There comes no angel to mediate, albeit
 each hour held salvation, especially one, in which, however, but
 freezing conjugal formalities pass, or -

"Our chain through silence clanks"

For after all it seems the wife, pure, was reclaimable; but
 he relentlessly held to distraction in the "golden-headed" one,
 though at times alarmed, lest the old love still breathed.

"Terrible Love, I ween
 Has might, even dead, half sighing to upheave
 The lightless seas of selfish amain.....
 The dread that my old love may be alive,
 Has seized my nursing new love by the throat."

As a strange climax to the terrible drama, the wife sacri-
 fices her home rather to the desire of peace for her husband,
 who might then "seek that other", than to any search of a drug
 for herself, or infatuation for the original "disturbing shadow".

After which there is an abrupt conclusion in her death, and
a laconic epitaph on the part of the author.

78

Turning from the spell of this powerful production,
here is a sweet lyric, called "The Young Usurper" -

"On my darling's bosom
Has dropped a living rosy bud,
Fair as brilliant Hesper
Against the brimming flood.
She handles him,
She dandles him,
She fondles him and eyes him;
And if upon a tear he wakes,
With many a kiss she dries him,
She covets every move he makes,
And never enough can prize him.
Ah! the young usurper!
I yield my golden throne:
Such angel bands attend his hands
To claim it for his own."

To classical taste the following poem of "Cassandra" may
be submitted; there is a roll through it, and so true a ring
of inspiration that (with previous commendation of the choral
cast of each final line) we can only present it to the reader
entire:-

I.

"Captive on a foreign shore,
Far from Ilion's hoary wave,
Agamemnon's bridal slave
Speaks futurity no more;
Death is busy with her grave.

II.

"Thick as water, bursts remote
Round her ears the alien din,
While her little sullen chin
Fills the hollows of her throat;
Silent lie her slaughter'd kin.

III.

"Once to many a pealing shriek,
Lo, from Ilion's topmost tower,
Ilion's fierce prophetic flower
Cried the coming of the Greek!
Black in Hades sits the hour.

IV.

"Eyeing phantoms of the past,
Folded like a prophet's scroll,
In the deep's long shoreward roll
Here she sees the anchor cast;
Backward moves her sunless soul.

V.

"Chieftains, brethren of her joy,
Shades, the white light in their eyes
Slanting to her lips, arise,
Crowding quick the plains of Troy;
Now they tell her not she lies.

VI.

"O the bliss upon the plains
 Where the joining heroes clsh'd
 Shield and spear, and, unabashed,
 Challeng'd with hot chariot-reins
 Gods! - they glimmer ocean-wash'd.

VII.

"Alien voices found the ships,
 Thick as water, shouting Home,
 Argives, pale as midnight foam,
 Wax before her awful lips:
 White as stars that front the gloom.

VIII.

"Like a torch-flame that by day
 Up the daylight twists, and, pale,
 Catches air in leaps that fail
 Crush'd by the inveterate ray,
 Through her shines the Ten Years' Tale

IX.

"Once to many a pealing shriek,
 Lo! from Ilion's topmost tower,
 Ilion's fierce prophetic flower,
 Cried the coming of the Greek!
 Black in Hades sits the hour.

X.

"Still upon her sunless soul,
 Gleams the narrow hidden space
 Forward, where her fiery race
 Falters on its ashen goal:
 Still the future strikes her face.

XI.

"See, towards the conqueror's car
 Steps the purple Queen, whose hate
 Wraps red-armed her royal mate
 With his Asian tempest star;
 Now Cassandra views her fate.

XII.

"King of men! the blinded host
 Shout: She lifts her brooding chin:
 Glad along the joyous din
 Smiles the grand majestic ghost:
 Clytemnestra leads him in.

XIII.

"Lo, their smoky limbs aloof,
 Shadowing heaven and the seas,
 Fates and Furies, tangling Threes,
 Tear and mix above the roof:
 Fates and fierce Eumenides.

XIV.

"Is the prophetess with rods
 Beaten, that she writhes in air?
 With the gods who never spare,
 Wrestling with the unsparing gods,
 Lone, her body struggles there.

XV.

"Like the snaky torch-flame white,
 Levell'd as aloft it twists,
 She, with soaring arms, and wrists
 Drooping, struggles with the light,
 Helios, bright above all mists!

XVI.

XVI.

"In his orb she sees the tower,
Dusk against its flaming rims,
Where of old her wretched limbs
Twisted with the stolen power:
Ilion all the lustre dims!

XVII.

"O the bliss upon the plains,
Where the joining heroes clash'd
Shield and spear, and, unabash'd,
Challenged with hot chariot-reins
Gods! - they glimmer ocean-washed.

XVIII.

"Thrice the sun-god's name she calls;
Shrieks the deed that shames the sky;
Like a fountain leaping high,
Falling as a fountain falls:
Lo, the blazing wheels go by!

XIX.

"Captive on a foreign shore,
Far from Ilion's hoary wave,
Agamemnon's bridal slave
Speaks futurity no more:
Death is busy with her grave."

Entirely Mr. George Meredith's own are his "Roadside Philosophers", a set of ballads in the form of monologues, and placed in the mouth of men lowest in the social scale, such as a juggler, and an old Chartist returned from transportation, a beggar and a working engineer. The writer evidently enjoys the study of this class of character, and the interpretation of their souls, in much the same manner as the great artist of "Adam Bede" and "Silas Marner". Poor old "Juggling Jerry" is dying out on the common, and expatiates to his faithful "old girl" upon the

"Smells of the gorse, so nutty,
Gold-like and warm: it's the prime of May,
Better than mortar, brick, and putty,
Is God's house on a blowing day."

and informs her at such a moment -

"It's past parsons to console us,
No, nor no doctor fetch for me;
I can die without my bolus;
Two of a trade, lass, never agree!
Parson and doctor! - don't they love rarely,
Fighting the devil in other men's fields!
Stand up yourself and match him fairly,
Then see how the rascal yields!"

The old Chartist draws his moral, as he sits by a ditch, from an old brown rat, who sits on a mud-bank, trying to clean himself, though "his trade is dirt", bent notwithstanding this upon his own self-esteem; and the "Beggar's

"Soliloquy" is full of rough and humorous perception, as one Sunday he lies on the heath watching the people go to church:-

"The church bells sound water-like over the wheat;
And up the long path troop pair after pair,
The man's well brushed and the woman looks neat;
It's man and woman everywhere!
Unless, like me, you lie here flat,
With a donkey for friend, you must have a wife:
She pulls out your hair, but she brushes your hat
Appearances make the best half of life".

Thus curtly the vagabond disposes of the grand sentiment:-

"Love burns as long as the lucifer match,
Wedlock's the candle; now that's my creed."

(The next few lines in which the writer comments briefly on "The Meeting" and "Margaret's Bridal Eve", are not included here as they were unfortunately obscured on the photostat copy of the review, which concludes as follows:)

In a piece called "Phantasy" occurs this voluptuous picture of Naiads:-

"Lilies, golden and white, by the curls
Of their broad flat leaves hung swaying,
A wreath of languid twining girls
Stream'd upward, long locks disarraying."

But the temptation to extract is leading to excess of space, and probably enough has been given to make all genuine lovers of poetry prefer the satisfaction of referring to the volume for themselves.

(The Athenaeum : No. 1806. May 31, 1862 pp. 719-720.
 "The Athenaeum mildly pats me on the back", is Meredith's
 reference, in a letter, to this review.)

The story of 'Modern Love' is rather hinted at than told.

There is nothing of orderly statement and little of clear and connected suggestion. These sonnets resemble scattered leaves from the diary of a stranger. The allusions, the comments, the interjections, all refer to certain particulars which are not directly related, and have to be painfully deduced. We are not sure that, after great labour, we have arrived at Mr. Meredith's drift; but we are quite sure that, if we have, we do not care for it. So far as we have groped our way, the tale seems that of a man who is jealous of his wife. It appears that she is still faithful to the bonds of wedlock, though not to those of love. The phases of the husband's torture are elaborately set forth - often with spasmodic indistinctness, but now and then with real force and imagination. A May-day recalls the Spring when she yet loved him. At a village festival he sardonically contrasts his refined misery with the coarse happiness of the revellers. At dinner the wedded pair play host and hostess, and mask their wretchedness with smiles. Here is a recollection of past joy, which appeals to the heart through ear and eye, like an echo from a ruin:

"In our old shipwreck'd days there was an hour

 (whole poem quoted)

Now am I haunted by that taste! that sound! "

Few of the sonnets, however, are so intelligible as the foregoing. The abrupt and obscure style which too often prevails may be learnt from the next example. Yet, whoever has patience to spell out its meaning, may catch a fine image in the closing lines:-

"A message from her set his brain aflame

 (whole poem quoted)

A wave of the great waves of Destiny
 Convuls'd at a check'd impulse of the heart".

It would seem - but we still write under correction - that the husband strives to console himself by the stimulant of a new passion.

We infer that the expedient is a double failure. Yielding no relief to the conscientious husband, it revives, through jealousy, the all-but-dead affection of his wife. But her contrition apparently comes too late, for we think she takes poison. Still, this is a mere conjecture, from a dark hint or two, which the reader can interpret for himself:-

"About the middle of the night her call,
Was heard, and he came wondering to the bed.
"Now kiss me, dear! it may be, now!" she said.
Lethe had pass'd those lips, and he knew all.

We have already intimated that 'Modern Love' contains passages of true beauty and feeling; but they are like the casual glimpses of a fair landscape in some noxious clime, where the mists only break to gather again more densely. Besides, the best gifts of expression would be wasted on a theme so morbid as the present. It is true that poetic genius has often revealed to us the diseases of our nature; but they have been only a portion of the exhibition. The causes which produced them, and the results in which they were expiated or subdued, have also been given. The bane has shown the virtue of the antidote. In 'Modern Love' we have disease, and nothing else.

With a sense of relief we turn to the more wholesome poems in the volume. 'Grandfather Bridgeman' is a pathetic story, told with fair effect and with some success in the delineation of character. In his portrait of the farmer, however, Mr. Meredith does not always discriminate between the homely and the coarse. The poem is disfigured, too by abrupt transitions, and, at times, by a vagueness of style inexcusable in one who can write to the point when he pleases. 'The Old Chartist', again, is well drawn upon the whole; but the lesson which he derives from a water-rat, though correct is not sufficiently obvious. A moral of this kind should not have to be reasoned out, but, like that of a fable, should seize the reader at once.

Of Mr. M's character-pieces the best is 'Juggling Jerry'. Jerry

is/

* For M. read Meredith.

is a conjuror struck with mortal sickness; he pitches his tent on a familiar spot, where his old horse has been used to graze, and where the gorse blooms from which he has often hung his kettle. In this scene he recalls to his wife the story of their lives, and strives to comfort her in the closing hours of their union. The pathos and humour of this conception enhance each other, while the poor juggler's love of nature is true in itself and expressed in the graphic idioms that befit the speaker. The lyric of "Cassandra" embodies a fine conception of the dying prophetess, and is free from the blemishes of caprice and obscurity. We cannot say as much for "Phantasy", which is founded on the poetical superstition of the Willie. "Phantasy" is written with spirit, and contains some striking though grotesque pictures. We grant that the subject admits of fantastic treatment; but freedom is here pushed into licence. In poetry, even humour should not be prosaic and coarse; but Mr. M's is both. His dancing Phantom has nothing of the supernatural charm that belonged to her in the original legend, which, by the way, formed some years since the groundwork of a ballet for Taglioni. The danseuse might have taught a lesson to the poet. She raised the invention of the maitre de ballet into poetry; Mr. M. takes a poetical conception and degrades it into that of a ballet-girl.

"A darling of pink and spangles;
One fair foot level with her face,
And the hearts of men at her ankles."

This whim of thrusting bald realities into poetry reaches its climax in the lines headed 'By the Rosanna'. The poem opens with a life-like description of the "torrent-river", and the dash of its waters is caught happily in the verse. The grandeur of nature, however, only suggests to Mr. M. London by gaslight; and, for the Naiad who should haunt the solitude, he invokes the "Season-Beauty", who, in this case, seems to be an inveterate jilt. After other profound questions touching the lady, he demands -

* For M. read Meredith.

"What say you, if, in this retreat,
While she poises tiptoe on yon granite slab, man,
I introduce her, shy and sweet,
To a short-neck'd, many-cap'd, London cabman?"

Of course there is a philosophy running through this doggerel, and we must subscribe to the writer's doctrine when he says -

"If Sentiment won't wed with Fact,
Poor Sentiment soon needs perfuming."

- Still, the "fact", however plain, must have a poetic life in it. Of course there may be such life in a cabman; but to find it we must see the man's nature, not merely the 'short neck' and 'many capes' which represent him here. Mr. M's forced transitions from the ideal to the prosaic are merely an outrage upon taste. The versatility at which he aims is admirable when shown within the limits of Art, but worthless as easy when it transgresses them.

The absurdities of this volume are the more to be lamented because, in spite of them, it displays some fine qualities. There is an Autumnal Ode, for instance, which, though not free from the author's besetting vagueness, has noble passages. The wild evening finds its faithful mirror and the wind its own turbulent chant in the lines that follow:-

"Forth from the clover sky

.....

..... upon the vale that under lay."

Few readers, we think, will deny the poetic feeling and the truth of observation which our extract reveals. But if these gifts are to produce a lasting result, Mr. M. must add to them a healthier purpose, a purer taste and a clearer style."

(The Westminster Review : July and October 1862
Vol. XXII P. 284. Belles Lettres Section.)

"In Mr. George Meredith's poems,^{*1} there is a freshness and and vigour not often met with at the present day. Moreover, there are no traces in them of imitation of any of our popular poets. Their faults are frequent roughness and occasional obscurity. Some

* Modern Love, and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads : by George Meredith.

of Mr. M's lines are very terse and effective. Several passages in his poems prove him to be a sharp observer and skilful analyst of human motives. Let the following serve as an example:-

"How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
When others pick it up becomes a gem!
We grasp at all the wealth it is to them;
And by reflected light its worth is found.
Yet for us still 'tis nothing! and that zeal
Of false appreciation quickly fades." (P.73)

There is much truth in this remark by "The Old Chartist":-

"She suffered for me:- women, you'll observe,
Don't suffer for a Cause, but for a man." (P.98).

There is both truth and force in the lines employed by a beggar to characterize a lady:-

"You nice little madam! you know you're nice.
I remember hearing a parson say,
You're a plateful of vanity, peppered with vice." (P.103).

How much is condensed in the following short lines:-

"Life is but the pebble sunk;
Deeds, the circle growing!" (P.151).

It is unfortunate that the subjects of many of these poems are tales of guilt and sin, of women's temptation and fall. The manner in which Mr. Meredith treats his subjects convinces us that he has real poetical talents, and is capable, too, of producing still more effective poems than those contained in this volume. The contrast is striking between the pithy style of Mr. Meredith and the polished language of Mr. Francis Mackay.^{*2}
....." (A review of Mackay's Poems follows)

(The Saturday Review : October 24, 1863 p.562-563.)

"We are in the present day overrun by clever writers of fiction, and of that species of verse which is spun from the same kind of intellectual web that produces fiction. But the names of English novelists and versifiers now living who may be said to unite real originality of thought and aim with conspicuous cleverness in workmanship are almost few enough to be counted on the fingers. Among these few Mr. George Meredith unquestionably holds a place. His

^{*2} Author of "Lays and Poems of Italy". By Francis Alexander Mackay.

* For M. read Meredith.

novel of Evan Harrington, which appeared three or four years ago, contained some of the most purely original conceptions that have been attempted by any writer of novels of character for a long time past. The same may be said of the volume of poems which he has, like Professor Kingsley, Miss Muloch, Mr. Farrar, and half a score more, as in duty bound, composed and published. He is in the habit of genuinely drawing from his own resources of observation and reflection, and his strong thought and quaint expression remind us, here and there - though at a considerable interval - of Robert Browning. In skill of phrase and rhyme he is quite as happy as his greater contemporary, and often less obscure. The poem of "The Old Chartist" is, for instance, a capital piece of writing, with an obvious and simple design. An ancient shoemaker, who in early life has had the misfortune to cross the water on account of misbehaviour on a Chartist platform, returns to his native town at the expiration of his time, and is converted to common sense by seeing a water-rat scrubbing his face contentedly by a brookside. The fresh-hearted old vagabond is made to soliloquise thus

"Whate'er I be, old England is my dam!
So, there's my answer to the judges, clear.
I'm, nothing of a fox, nor of a lamb;
I don't know how to bleat nor how to leer:
I'm for the nation!
That's why you see me by the wayside here,
Returning home from transportation.

It's summer in her bath this morn, I think.
I'm fresh as dew, and chirpy as the birds:
And just for joy to see old England wink
Thro' leaves again, I could harangue the herds:
Isn't it something
To speak out like a man when you've got words,
And prove you're not a stupid dumb thing?"

He presently espies the water-rat going through his morning's washing, and the train of natural thought and feeling set in motion by that sight is exceedingly well described. The first wonder is the apparent incongruity of cleanliness with the antecedents and present position of a rat:-

"His seat is on a mud-bank, and his trade
Is dirt and yet
The fellow's all as anxious as a maid
To show a decent dress, and dry the wet."

In the eye of nature, however, there seems to be nothing incongruous:-

"The elms and yellow reed-flags in the sun,
Look on quite grave:- the sunlight flecks his side;
And links of bindweed-flowers round him run,
And shine up doubled with him in the tide.
I'm nearly splitting,
But nature seems like seconding his pride,
And thinks that his behaviour's fitting."

This simple spectacle introduces into the breast of the old grumbler the thin end of the wedge of self-knowledge. He has been picking holes in his superiors' coats and denouncing the wrong, while he ought to have been doing the right. He will henceforward be wiser, and live the life of the rat, "pleasing himself and his Creator". He will go quietly home, mend the gentry's boots, comfort his old wife - who, while detesting his ways and his views, had faithfully stood by him with the consoling tea-can in the dock - and on some future Sunday he will bring his fine daughter, with her smug draper-husband, to see the model democrat of the mud-bank. "The Old Chartist" is certainly a good piece of writing of its kind, and "Juggling Jerry", the "Beggar's Soliloquy", and "Grandfather Bridgeman", are nearly, if not quite, up to the same standard.

It is in the direction of this racy and vigorous style of composition that Mr. George Meredith's real forte lies, though he would hardly be inclined to subscribe to that opinion. Few people who have aimed at fine writing find it easy or pleasant to believe that their strength lies, after all, in something which, from the fine writer's point of view, seems to be very far below. However, a perusal of Mr. George Meredith's more ambitious productions, and especially of *Modern Love* - the composition which he has thought worthy of giving a name to his collection - leads one reluctantly to the conclusion that he has entirely mistaken his powers, and has utterly marred what might have been a rare and successful volume. It was bad enough to quit the "English Roadside" for a ranting rhapsody like the "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn", which we should conjecture to have been written at a very early age, when

Shelley was less perfectly understood than ardently and blindly adored. The lines which follow, and which are supposed to indicate the rising of a violent south-wester, are among the milder and less uproarious passages of the ode:-

"Still on the farthest line, with outpuff'd cheeks,
Twixt dark and utter dark, the great wind drew
From heaven that disenchant'd harmony
To join earth's laughter in the midnight blind:
Booming a distant chorus to the shrieks,
Preluding him : then he,
His mantle streaming thunderingly behind,
Across the yellow realm of stiffen'd Day,
Shot thro' the woodland alleys signals three;
And with the pressure of a sea,
Plunged broad upon the vale that under lay."

The first line reminds one of the old illustration to the fable, where the traveller, wrapped in a cloak, is plodding along beneath the influence of two round faces, one representing the north wind and the other the sun. The single voice issuing from the "out-puff'd cheeks" is made to boom "a chorus" to the preluding shrieks, the nature of which last we should conceive that it must be equally difficult to imagine and to describe. The "yellow realm of stiffen'd Day" no doubt sounds as if something like it might have occurred in "In Memoriam"; but we venture to assert that no parallel passage to the line is to be found in that poem, any more than to the "thunderingly streaming" appearance which was remarked in the south-west wind's mantle. There is a passage in the otherwise excellent poem called "Grandfather Bridgeman" which is congenial to these extracts, and seems too good of its sort to be omitted. It is not often that metaphor is confused with more completeness than in this description of a summer morning:-

"The day was a van-bird of summer; the robin still piped, but
the blue,
A warm and creamy palace with voices of larks ringing thro',
Locked down as if wistfully eyeing the blossoms that fell from
its lap."

It is, as we have said, bad enough that a writer of real ability and skill should allow himself to associate this kind of fustian with poems of worth and merit. But Mr. George Meredith's descent from his "roadside" style of thought and composition to his lyrical

mood is, we regret to say, only trifling compared with the change which he undergoes when he indulges in an elaborate analysis of a loathsome series of phenomena which he is pleased to call "modern love". The poem called Modern Love is of considerable length, and has clearly had a large share of labour bestowed on its preparation. The mere composition is sometimes very graceful, and always exceedingly ingenious. The few short passages quoted below appear to us to contain real beauty:-

"With slow foot
The low, rosed moon, the face of Music mute,
Begins among her silent bars to climb."

"How many a thing quickly fades"

"The golden foot of May is on the flowers,
And friendly shadows dance upon her brow"

"Wavering pale before me there,
Her tears fall still as oak-leaves after frost."

But no word-painting or clever analysis can atone for a choice of subject which we cannot help regarding as involving a grave moral mistake - a mistake so grave as utterly to disqualify the chooser from achieving any great and worthy result in art. The whole of this poem is occupied in portraying the miseries of married life as it exists in our modern society. The writer's apology for his mistake would probably be the same that he has put into the mouth of one of his characters:-

"These things are life;
And life, they say, is worthy of the Muse."

A more flimsy sophism could hardly be devised. The Muse is undoubtedly concerned with all forms of life, but these things are decay, and deformity, and death. So far from a condition of doubt and uncertainty on the general tone of matrimonial morality being in any sense an interesting or attractive thing, it is one of the most disastrous calamities that can befall a nation.

To write of the rotten places of our social system as if they were fitting subjects for the Muse is just as reasonable as it would be to compose a sonnet to the gout or an ode on the small-pox.

Besides/

Besides, the subject is old and outworn, exhausted by far abler hands than those of Mr. George Meredith. With the great literary error of Don Juan before his eyes, it was scarcely worth his while to commit the sickly little peccadillo of Modern Love. It was no doubt his conviction, derived from French authorities, that there is a species of nineteenth-century infidelity, more recondite, more interesting, more intellectual forsooth, than those which have gone before, and that this novelty was not undeserving of a bard. If he should be at any time desirous of taking the measure of his work, it would not be an uninstructive process to read over the poem "Guinevere" in Idylls of the King, and then to peruse some half-dozen of his own cantos. The contrast might disabuse him of the notion that he has succeeded in producing, under the title of Modern Love, anything worthy of the name of art. If he could regard his clever performance as others see it, he might perhaps agree with us in thinking that his utmost achievement has been to throw the thin veil of Coan drapery over a set of grinning skeletons."

POEMS AND LYRICS
OF
THE JOY OF EARTH
BY
GEORGE MEREDITH.
1883.

Reviews:

- * The Times, June 11, 1883, p. 4.
- The St. James's Gazette, June 25, 1883 pp. 6-7.
- * The Athenaeum, July 28, 1883 pp. 103-4 by Theodore Watts-Dunton.
- The Pall Mall Gazette, June 29, 1883, pp. 4-5.
- * The Academy, July 21, 1883 pp. 37-38 by Mark Pattison.
- The Scotsman, July 21, 1883 p. 7.
- The Manchester Guardian, July 23, 1883 p. 7.
- * Merry England, August 1883, pp. 316-8 by A. M.
- The Literary World, August 3, 1883 pp. 67-8.
- * The Glasgow Herald, August 7, 1883 p. 3, and August 14, p. 3, by Moncure D. Conway.
- * The Contemporary Review, September, 1883 pp. 465-6 by W. P. Ker.
- The Argus, Melbourne, September 15, 1883 p. 4.
- * The Fortnightly Review, November 1883 pp. 717-8 by W. L. Courtney.
- The Daily News, December 4, 1883, p. 3.
- The Literary World, Boston, December 15, 1883 p. 454.
- The Critic, New York, December 29, 1883 p. 533.
- * The Annual Register for 1883, part (ii) pp. 78-9.

POEMS AND LYRICS

OF

THE JOY OF EARTH.

1883.

(From The Times : June 11, 1883 page 4.)

Mr. George Meredith's New Poems.*

"More than 30 years ago Mr. Meredith issued a small volume of poems, and this was followed by a second at an interval of 10 or 12 years. These volumes are now exceedingly rare. The vein of originality in them, however, was so unmistakable that critics welcomed them with fervour, and predicted for their author a considerable place among contemporary poets. But Mr. Meredith is not one to force the soil, and since that time, with the exception of fugitive pieces of verse, he has put forth no sustained effort in poetry. But he has been by no means idle, as a series of the most brilliant and unconventional novels in the language can testify. Though not popular in the ordinary sense, these works enjoy a distinction which many writers would covet in vain; they are the favourite reading of many intellectual men, men who can admire the independence, the originality, and the powerful satire of their author. Not one of our writers of fiction, for example, has given us a book so full of epigram or so searching in its philosophy of human nature as "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel".

It is but natural, therefore, that the announcement of a new volume of poems by this writer should stir the languid depths of literature. It will be found that these "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth" fulfil their designation with a force and vigour which are quite refreshing. Their actual poetic qualities also are of a fairly high order. Mr. Meredith is an intense naturalist in the sense that the great Book of Nature seems to be unsealed for him. He appears almost as much at home with Nature in her varying moods

*"Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth". By George Meredith. London: Macmillan & Co. 1883

"Singing till his heaven fills,
 'Tis love of earth that he instils,
 And ever winging up and up,
 Our valley is his golden cup,
 And he the wine which overflows
 To lift us with him as he goes:
 The woods and brooks, the sheep and kine,
 He is, the hills, the human line,
 The meadows green, the fallows brown,
 The dreams of labour in the town:
 He sings the sap, the quickened veins,
 The wedding song of sun and rains
 He is, the dance of children, thanks
 Of sowers, shout of primrose-banks,
 And eye of violets while they breathe;
 All these the circling song will wreath.
 And you shall hear the herb and tree,
 The better heart of men shall see,
 Shall feel celestially, as long
 As you crave nothing but the song."

This is the soul and meaning to extract from the lark's song, and probably there is no more admirable passage in this little volume -

"Was never voice of ours could say
 Our inmost in the sweetest way,
 Like yonder voice aloft, and link
 All hearers in the song they drink:
 Our wisdom speaks from failing blood,
 Our passion is too full in flood,
 We want the key, of his wild note
 Of truthful in a tuneful throat,
 The song seraphically free
 Of taint of personality,
 So pure that it salutes the suns
 The voice of one for millions,
 In whom the millions rejoice
 For giving their one spirit voice."

Yet men have we, whom we revere,
 Now names, and men still housing here.
 Whose lives by many a battle-dint
 Defaced, and grinding wheels on flint,
 Yield substance, though they sing not sweet
 For song our highest heaven to greet:
 Whom heavenly singing gives us new,
 Enspires them brilliant, in our blue,
 From firmest base to farthest leap.
 Because their love of Earth is deep,
 And they are warriors in accord
 With life, to serve and pass reward,
 So touching purest and so heard
 In the brain's reflex of yon bird:
 Wherefore their soul in me, or mine,
 Through self-forgetfulness divine.
 In them, that song aloft maintains,
 To fill the sky and thrill the plains
 With showerings drawn from human stores
 As he to silence nearer soars,
 Extends the world at wings and dome,
 More spacious making more our home,
 Till lost on his aerial rings,
 In light, and then the fancy sings."

We are glad to find that the author has enlarged and completed an old favourite, "Love in the Valley"; but we are unable to quote

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from it without taking the whole. "The Orchard and the Heath" would have delighted the heart of George Borrow. The contrast between the children of civilisation, typical of the orchard, and the children of the wandering gipsy tribes, typical of the heath, is pointed with many natural touches.

But Mr. Meredith, besides being a realist as regards nature, is also a realist on the human side. He showed this in his dramatic "Poems of the English Roadside", of which "Juggling Jerry" will be remembered as one of the most powerful. His "Martin's Puzzle", is also a strongly human poem, and throws light upon this tangled web of human existence. Martin cannot understand why poor little Molly should have been made a cripple, nor her resignation under the physical curses which would make life a burden to most people. He comes to the conclusion that she must be made of wonderful stuff.

"Ay, the soul in her body must be a stout cord;
She sings little hymns at the close of the day
Though she has but three fingers to lift to the Lord,
And only one leg to kneel down with to pray."

Martin asks very old questions in a new form - questions which have puzzled men in all ages. He wants to know whether life is only a trial, and whether some must toil, and some perish, for the good of others?

"Stop a moment. I seize an idea from the pit.
They tell us that discord, though discord, alone,
Can be harmony when the notes properly fit:
Am I judging all things from a single false tone?
Is the Universe one immense Organ, that rolls
From devils to angels? I'm blind with the sight.
It pours such a splendour on heaps of poor souls!
I might try at kneeling with poor Molly to-night."

The volume closes with a series of sonnets which certainly add to the treasures of English literature in this respect. We have only room to quote one of the two sonnets on "The Spirit of Shakespeare"

"Thy greatest knew three, Mother Earth; unsoured
He knew thy sons. He probed from hell to hell
Of human passions, but of love deflowered
His wisdom was not, for he knew thee well.
Thence came the honeyed corner at his lips,
The conquering smile wherein his spirit sails
Calm as the God who the white sea-wave whips,
Yet full of speech and intershifting tales,
Close mirrors of us: thence had he the laugh
We feel is thine: broad as ten thousand beeves
At pasture! thence the songs that winnow chaff
From grain, bid sick Philosophy's last leaves
Whirl, if they have no response - they enforced
To fatten Earth when from her soul divorced."

This is a book for poets, and for all others who, while they are unable to write poetry themselves, have the capacity to enjoy it. The joys of earth are great, and have been worthily sung. We shall not enter into the question whether a philosophy fed on nature is sufficient to satisfy all the aspirations of the human soul; but as to the wonderful beauty, delight, music, song, and rapture to be found in nature all must be in accord. The reflection of the reader on closing this little volume will be that Mr. Meredith cannot do better than give us more of these genuine lyrics in praise of the joy of earth."

(From The Athenaeum : Saturday, July 28, 1883 pp 103-104. This review has on good authority been attributed to Theodore Watts-Dunton, the leading critic on The Athenaeum from 1876-1898; as a critic he was clear-minded and finely balanced. Watts-Dunton is remembered chiefly for his friendship with Swinburne and Rossetti. He was an admirer of Meredith's work and published a birthday-sonnet in The Saturday Review to honour the poet's seventy-sixth birthday; he was also one of the eminent writers who signed the congratulatory address sent to Meredith on his seventieth birthday.)

"It is a comfort to find at last a poet who can sing "the joy of earth." Ever since Virgil's time - to go no further back - the poets, with a few exceptions, seem to have considered it to be their special function to sing not the joy, but the misery of earth; or else, ignoring the earth altogether, to sing about themselves from their own orchestra in their own "golden clime" above the clouds. Which is the greater plague to the listener, the poet's lamentation about earth's woes, or his song about himself from a kingdom so far removed from common sympathies as his own, it would be difficult to decide. The question, however, is important just now. No sooner had Shelley's music begun to captivate the world than a large number of our poets set to work upon the theory that between themselves and us, their humble servants, who listen, there is a wide gulf fixed. Their theory, in short, was that they are to warble like birds of another world. Sydney Dobell (whose influence has been much more potent than is generally supposed) was a remarkable specimen of this race; so was Alexander Smith. No doubt they were both men of genius; but/

but the strange thing is that they were men of common sense to boot. This is seen in Dobell's Edinburgh lecture upon poetry, in which he said admirably that the poet must be "the man with the perfect mind", and that "the poem is the perfect expression of that perfect mind"; yet in 'Balder' Dobell, and in the 'Life Drama' Alexander Smith, produced each a poem so exactly like a Bedlamite's poem, that nothing will ever now persuade the general reader that they were not each more or less mad. We were the first who pointed out that they were, on the contrary, two of the sanest men of their time, and that the reason why 'Balder' and the 'Life Drama' read like a Bedlamite's poems is this, that the writers deliberately tried to make them read so. And so poets of our own day are apt to forget in their worship of Shelley that, admitting Dobell's Theory about the poets' "perfect mind", the question still is, What kind of mind is the perfect mind? Is it that mind which, like the mind of Homer, of Sophocles, of Shakespeare, of Goethe, is in accord with the healthy mind of general humanity? or is it that mind which, like Shelley's in his 'Laon and Cythna', and like Blake's in his prophetic books, is in accord with nothing, not even with itself and the phantasms of its own conjuring? The country from which the followers of Shelley sing to our lower world was admirably named "Nowhere" by Mr. P. J. Bailey. And one of the most striking scenes of 'Festus' would seem to show that "Nowhere" is a country of remarkable geographical peculiarities. In our own day, the great glory of Mr. Tennyson's work and life is his noble endeavour to bring back poetry from the region of "Nowhere" into the region of "Somewhere". Mr. Browning, too, has not been without splendid successes in this direction, yet, as we have before pointed out, in such poems as 'La Saisiaz' he is apt to fall into the mistake which spoilt Hamlet's life - that of trying to make the best of both these worlds. And so with most nineteenth century poets except Keats. Finding that they have two places to think about at once - the physical universe and that which is beyond the physical universe -

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they cannot determine which they will claim for inheritance. Having these two "wheres", "Somewhere" and "Nowhere", upon which to exercise their "perfect minds", they are vexed by an embarras de richesses.

Among the poets of this century, Shelley, as we have said, has much to answer for as being the first who seriously set the example of soaring away into cloudy regions, though unquestionably he succeeded marvellously. And in criticism Shelley's success has given rise to two strange notions: first, that because there is such a thing as the "fine frenzy" of the poet, the more "frenzy" the better - the more the poet can write as an inspired madman would write the better; and secondly, that "Nowhere" is the poet's proper orchestra from which to sing to us.

Both these inferences are, however, wrong, as the name of Mr. Meredith's volume seems to hint. First, there is no reason whatever why a poet should be madder than the rest of us; and, secondly, so far from "Nowhere" being his proper singing gallery, if ever there was a vocalist whose place is especially and peculiarly "Somewhere", that vocalist is the poet; for it is he who, specially and professionally, should deal with the concrete, leaving abstractions to transcendentalist philosophers. All that the poet has to do with abstractions, though he had always much better leave them alone, is to do as Shakespeare does - take them and turn them into concretions; for the artist is simply the man who by instinct embodies in concrete forms that which is essential and elemental in nature and in man, the poetic artist being he who by instinct chooses for his concrete forms musical language. And the questions to be asked concerning any work of art are simply these: Is that which is embodied really elemental? and is the concrete form embodying it really beautiful? Any other question is an impertinence. "Somewhere" being the poets' home, the most awkward results naturally follow if the poet wanders, as so many of our contemporary poets do wander into "Nowhere", the most unpleasant of these results being that when he comes to address us he can sing about nothing and nobody but himself; whereas his

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highest duty as a singer, to say nothing of his duty as a gentleman, is to keep himself modestly in the background and sing about other people. Mr. Meredith recognizes this fact in the most beautiful poem of his volume:-

"For singing till his heaven fills
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup.....
.....
Till lost on his aerial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings."

Still Mr. Meredith should bear in mind that he who would sing to us of the joy of earth should first make sure that he has a good voice for singing. Throughout the entire animal kingdom there is, it seems, no subject upon which a vocalist is so apt to deceive himself as upon the quality of his voice. "It is given to the very frogs", says Pascal, "to find music in their own croaking", and no doubt the look of self-satisfaction on the face of a croaking frog is scarcely to be matched in nature. Nor, we may rest assured, is there one among the countless verse-mongers of our time who does not find a music in his own lines delightful to himself, though perhaps undiscoverable to other and shorter ears than his own. But the singer of the "joy of earth" requires a voice of such exceptional power and sweetness that partial failure in such a song should be called partial success.

The descriptions in the first poem in the volume, 'The Woods of Westermain', are exceedingly vivid and beautiful:-

"Here the snake across your path
.....
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare
Open hither, open hence
Scarce a bramble
.....
Shadowed leagues of slumbering sound."

On the whole, the most important poem in the volume is 'The Day of the Daughter of Hades'. Mr. Meredith seems to have an ear for iambic rather than for anapaestic movements, though, for some reason or another, he seems fond of writing in anapaests. There is no more clear and sharp distinction between poets than that which divides them between poets who have the iambic ear and poets who have the anapaestic.

While writers like Keats and Wordsworth in passing from the iambic to the anapaestic movement pass at once into doggerel, writers like Shelley and Mr. Swinburne are so entirely at home in anapaestic movements that even their iambic lines seem always on the verge of leaping into the anapaestic dance.

If verse were simply quintessential prose, then assuredly Mr. M.^{*1} would be one of the most effective poets living. In the art of "packing a line" he is almost without living equal. Take the following stanzas from the poem called 'Earth and Man':-

"He may entreat, aspire,
He may despair, and she has never heed.
She drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need
not his desire.

She prompts him to rejoice,
Yet scares him on the threshold with the shroud.
He deems her cherishing of her best-endowed
A wanton's choice."

The two lines italicised^{*2} are much more than quintessential prose, they are poetry worthy of almost any writer in the English language. But the line which follows them is metrically bad, and bad in the worst way, for it shows that, he whose natural instinct, judging from the sonnets in the volume, is to avoid elision and to spread out the syllables of his line after Keats's fashion, attempts an elision here without having the slightest notion of what is the true nature and function of elision in poetry. And throughout the book there are lines which strike upon the ear like flints:-

"She fancied; armed beyond beauty, and thence grew.
In mind only, and the perils that ensue.
Hear, then, my friend, madam! Tongue-restrained
he stands."

Still, notwithstanding all the rugged lines in this volume, such a poem as 'The Lark Ascending' is enough to show that Mr. Meredith has a true call to express himself in metre. And this is no faint praise, for among those who express, or endeavour to express, themselves in metre, how many have really a call to do so? Nothing is more inscrutable than the instinct for metrical expression. Carlyle's endowment of some of the poetic qualities - such as imagination, picturesqueness, emotive eloquence - was very great; but, judging from his own doggerel verses and his ignorant and stupid talk about

*1 For M. read Meredith.

*2 Indicated in the typing by underlining.

Keats and Shelley, his ear for music was the ear of Bully Bottom after he had been translated. The difference between literature and mere word-joining is that while literature is alive, word-joining is without life, and cannot by any power be vivified. This literary life is bipartite in prose, tripartite in poetry; that is to say, that while prose requires intellectual life and emotional life, poetry requires not only intellectual life and emotional life, but rhythmic life, this last being the most important of all. Unless the rhythm of any metrical passage is so vigorous, so natural, and so free that it seems as though it could live, if need were, by its rhythm alone, that passage has no right to existence, and should, if the substance is good, be forthwith demetricized and turned into honest prose; for, as Thoreau has pointed out, prose at its best has high qualities beyond the reach and ken of poetry, and to compensate for the sacrifice of these the metrical gains of any passage should be beyond all cavil.

In a language so powerful and yet so rude as ours - a language requiring such an infinity of manipulation before it can be worked into melodious sequences - the difficulty of producing poetry that is at once perfect in art and adequate to the emotive and intellectual power of the national character is enormous. A Greek of the time of Pericles might have nourished his genius upon all that the broadest Athenian life could afford, and yet so inherently melodious was his mother-tongue, he could have given in his verses all those subtle nuances of metrical effect which in more imperfect languages are the result of a lifelong study of poetry as a fine art. But, save in the cases of a few of the most illustrious names, the poets of England, and especially the poets of our own time, fail from that lack of experience of life without which poetry is but the idle tinkling of the lyre; or else, having that experience of life, they fail because they have had no time to overcome the countless technical difficulties and metrical delicacies of poetic art. Compare, for instance, the poems of the late Mr. O'Shaughnessy with the poems in this volume. So rugged, harsh, and flinty are many of Mr. M's lines, that the reading of them would have inflicted positive

Physical pain on O'Shaughnessy's ear. Yet we do not hesitate to say that the book contains more of the raw material of poetry than could have been produced by O'Shaughnessy in a lifetime. The throb of emotional and intellectual life stirs nearly every line; whereas in O'Shaughnessy's verses we find nothing but that rhythmic life without which no metrical writing has any raison d'être at all. The truth is that in modern England poetry is not large enough for the growing limbs of life, or rather our poetic forms are not large enough to cover the limbs of life and the limbs of art. Sir William Temple's comparison of life to a blanket too small for the bed was never so applicable as now. In order to pull it over one part of our bodies another part has to be left out in the cold.

'The Orchard and the Heath' is in Mr. Meredith's best way:-

"I chanced upon an early walk to spy

 (11 stanzas quoted to:)
 Far down with mellow orchards to endow."

Here the picture is brilliant, the suggested lesson of life healthy, manly, and bracing, and the metrical music as good, perhaps, as Mr. M. has achieved. Manliness and intellectual vigour combined with a remarkable picturesqueness are the most noticeable qualities of his volume."

(From The Academy, Vol. XXIV, No. 585, pp 37-38, July 21, 1883, by Mark Pattison. Pattison was made Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, in 1861, and became famous as a scholar and critic. An anonymous reviewer writing in The Literary Review of December 15, 1909 remarks, "Mark Pattison - of all people in the world! - reviewed for The Academy, 'Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth! This cold-blooded Oxford don", he writes, "was of course, wholly incapable of appreciating the open-air quality of Meredith's poems." This review is careful and scholarly but lacks enthusiasm and insight.)

"This is one of the most remarkable, perhaps the most remarkable, of the volumes of verse which have been put out during the last few years. But, indeed, the name of the author is a sufficient guarantee that so it would be; Mr. George Meredith is known to be little given to offering his readers that which is common.

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Mr. Meredith is well known, by name, to the widest circle of readers - the novel-readers. By name, because his name is a label warning them not to touch. They know that in volumes which carry that mark they will not find the comfortable conventionalities and paste diamonds which make up their ideal of "life". Worse than this, Mr. Meredith's prose requires attention - an impertinent requirement on the part of a novelist. Everybody knows that we go to a novel in order that we may occupy a vacant mind without giving attention.

To a higher, and vastly smaller, circle of readers, Mr. Meredith's stories - "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel", "Emilia in England", "Vittoria", "The Egoist" - are known as creations, singular without being eccentric, but whose singularity is marked by an imaginative presentment rather than by any special attraction of the characters and events presented. There is an atmosphere of poetry about the doings of his personages which gives us a happy fairyland sensation, even when, as is often the case, we do not much care for the doings themselves. The circle (a select one) of the readers of these novels, know that Mr. Meredith is a poet - in prose. Perhaps some of them may not know that he is a poet in the more usual acceptation of the term. Two little ventures of the usual "minor poetry" class, some thirty or more years back, had the inevitable fate of such volumes, came into the hands of but few, and were soon forgotten even by them. As Mr. Meredith does not include these poems in the list of his works which he has allowed to be given on the fly-leaf of the present volume, perhaps he is now unwilling to own them, and desires to have them regarded as "juvenilia". Any comparison of the present George Meredith with the George Meredith who had not yet stamped his quality upon "The Shavings (sic) of Shagpat" would be waste of labour. Yet I could almost fancy that more than one of the pieces in the new volume are developments of germs deposited in the earlier epoch of thought.

What is true of a whole poetic career is also true of any volume of collected pieces composed at long intervals. No one, not even

a critic, is always at his best. But in poetry we may go further, and say that the best of any poet is so rare and costly that it is indeed "Paucorum horarum". Take, e.g., the six volumes of Wordsworth's Poetical Works, and count the pieces - nay, rather, the lines - in which Wordsworth is at Wordsworth's best. We may strike out everything written after 1809, the most of it being not only below Wordsworth, but absolutely unworthy of him. All that is instinct with vital power in Wordsworth might be contained in a volume of much less compass than Mr. Matthew Arnold's Selections. A few sheets of letterpress would give us all that can live of Wordsworth - all except the Wordsworthian "Self"; and to distil this essence we must have the whole of the nine books of the "Excursion" and the whole of the fourteen books of the "Prelude".

It is therefore, no disparagement to say of the poems in the present volume that they are unequal in poetic merit. They all have the Meredithian quality, but in varying degrees of perfection. They are all out of the same vineyard, but of different vintages. To come to details, "Love in the Valley", e.g. does not rise in general conception and design above the average level of the "minor poet" as we know him. For this reason it will probably be one of the most popular. It has also the ordinary fault of the modern English poetry - diffuseness, the beating out of a small particle of metal into too thin foil. Yet "Love in the Valley" is redeemed from commonness by single strokes which are not within the reach of every day, as well as by a vigour of language which is Mr. Meredith's own property among all his competitors. Take this stanza, descriptive of morning light:-

"Happy, happy time,
..... as cold sea-shells".

I do not defend "bloomy" here said of dew. Mr. Meredith might have learned the meaning of "bloomy" from Milton, who uses it properly of the spray bursting into leaf in an English April. To apply "bloomy" to dew is too like that displacement of epithet which is one of the tricks by which the modern school of poets seeks to supply a spurious originality.

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"The day (sic) of the Daughter of Hades", is also liable to the charge of diffuseness. And it has the more serious fault of being a versified treatment of a legend provided by the Greek mythology. Because the Greek mythology is the most poetical known to us, it is natural to conceive that it must be good "material" for a poem. It was still possible in Milton's day, it was just possible for Gray, to vivify a classical myth. Even Gray only appeals to "Delphi's Steep", etc., incidentally; he does not insist on the classic theme. In the time in which we live, classical personages are too remote from the imaginative sphere of all but a score or two of Greek scholars to be helps to illusion. The 19th century poetical reader knows nothing of Grecian Sicily. It is super-adding another difficulty, which is superfluous, to one which is inherent in the nature of the case. We have to make a separate effort to get together the Greek imagery, in addition to the effort which all poetry demands of passing beyond the stereotype forms of every-day life to the spirit within them. Skiageneia, the daughter of Hades, is a thoroughly Burne-Jones maiden, tall as a poplar, with a "throat" and a wan smile, with "redness that streamed through her limbs in a flitting glow."

The piece which gives its character to the volume, and raises the whole above the average of the reproductions of Rossetti with which we are familiar, is the first, which is entitled "The Woods of Westermain". This piece seizes the imagination with a power which the vague and rather featureless "Daughter of Hades" does not possess. Many poets have signalled the romance that lies in forest depths, "the calling shapes and beckoning shadows". No poetical forest has surpassed in wealth of suggestion "the woods of Westermain". In these woods is no wizardry; no supernatural agents are at work. But if you enter them with a poet's eye and a poet's sensibility, you may see and hear that natural magic which surpasses all the fictitious tales of sorcerers, witches, wood gods, of Fauns and Dryads. The poem teaches, not didactically - for nothing is farther from its

form or its thought than the inculcation of doctrine - how what we see depends upon what we are; how transcendent influences are only to be approached through the real- the transmuted by the soul of the seer:

"Even as dewlight off the rose
In the mind a jewel sows.
Look you with the soul you see't."

The doctrine is old enough; the psychology of religion and that of poetry agree in it. Keats's Endymion, baffled in the search of the ideal, learns to find it in the real. In "the woods of Westermain" - ordinary woods, peopled only by the squirrel and the snake, the green woodpecker and the nightjar - you may read the whole history of the origin and development of things, from the time "when mind was mud", "earth a slimy spine, Heaven a space for winging tons". It is wholly in your own power what you shall make of earth. As you choose to look, she is either a dust-filled tomb or radiant with the blush of morning. Gaze under, and the soul is rich past computing. You must not only look, you must put off yourself, sink your individuality, you must let her "two-sexed meanings melt through you, wed the thought". Your rich reward will not only be in the power of understanding, but in a quickening joy, the "joy of earth" showered upon you without stint

"Drink the sense the notes infuse
You a larger self will find;
Sweetest fellowship ensues
With the creatures of your kind."

In contrast with the pessimistic tone and despairing notes of the modern school, Mr. Meredith offers "a song of gladness", and smiles with Shakespeare at a generation "ranked in gloomy noddings over life".

Such seems to be the drift of this remarkable lyric, remarkable rather for its expression than for its contents. Unfortunately, Mr. Meredith's healthy wisdom is veiled in the obscurity of a peculiar language which makes even his general drift doubtful, and the meaning of many score lines absolute darkness. Some writers, whom it is a fashion to admire, are obscure by twisting plain things

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with words that are not plain. They make platitudes into verbal puzzles. Mr. Meredith's obscurity proceeds from a better motive. He knows that poetry can only suggest, and destroys itself if it affirms. And as the moods he desires to suggest are remote from common experience, so also must the suggestive imagery be. Even the English language is inadequate to his requirements, and he tries to eke it out by daring compounds. The same resource tried long ago by Aeschylus was found to degenerate into bombast in a language which lends itself far more readily to compounds than ours does. In Mr. Meredith's lines these compounds have seldom the merit of being happily formed or of condensing expression. If we allow that their use originated in the poverty of the existing language, the habit of employing them constantly and upon all occasions grows up from their trouble-saving convenience. They are stop-gaps, and fill the place when the sense cannot be moulded into words proper without an expenditure of time which no modern writer will give. That the habit has settled itself upon Mr. Meredith's pen the following sample, taken from a very few pages, will show. We have - poppy-droop; bronze-orange; swan-wave; shore-bubble; rock-sourced; lost-to-light; instant-glancing; iron-resounding; spear-fitted; fool-flushed; ripple-feathered; dew-delighted; fountain-showers; stripe-shadowed; treasure-armful; circle-windsails; bully-drawlers; and so on without stint or limit. How many in the above collection, gathered at random, can be said to recommend themselves by their own elegance, or to be indispensable to the sense required, which most do but feebly express?

That I may not take an ungracious leave of a volume in which may be found so much to interest, I give a specimen of the sonnets, of which there are some twenty-three in the volume.

EARTH'S SECRET.

"Not solitarily in fields we find

 (Sonnet quoted in full)."

(From/

(From The Contemporary Review, September 1883, pp 465-6
by W. F. Ker. Extract from section headed "Poetry").

"Mr. George Meredith's "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth"^x have very little in them that is conventional or old-fashioned. Their general theme is an old one, it is true, but it is dealt with in a manner that is far from being common-place. The characteristic mark of the poems is the confidence with which they insist that the Earth and Man are not hackneyed or uninteresting subjects. Not all the prose pages that have ever been spoken or written concerning the unity and variety of Nature, concerning the destiny of man, can depress the spirit of a poet who chooses to forget the prose phrases. These "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth" have a fire in them which is dangerous to obstructions and commonplaces. They tear away comfortable theories that put a veil on the mystery of Nature. They are Protestant and destructive; the poet claims in them his right to disregard what he has not verified, his independence of tradition. He will have none of the superstition that the former glory has passed away from the earth. The earth is beautiful and terrible to any one who will claim his birthright as a son of the earth, and no nation or time has any special grace in this matter. It was once fashionable to say, with the enfants du siecle, that "we have come too late into a world too old". That saying came from prejudice and cowardice, and the poets who give up that prejudice have their reward. They find the way into "that new world which is the old", a world whose beauty is none the less eternal because poets and prosaists have spent centuries in making phrases about it.

There is nothing half-hearted or dispirited in Mr. Meredith's poems. They do not apologize in any way for their existence. They speak out because they have something to say, because the poet is quite sure of his object. The way in which the mythologies are used is an example of the unhesitating spirit of the poems. "Phoebus with Admetus", "Melampus" and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades",

^x"Poems and Lyric of the Joy of Earth". By George Meredith. London: Macmillan & Co. 1883.

are poems taken from Greek Legends. None of them show any misgiving about the expediency of repeating old stories. They are not repetitions^{ti} of old stories; they are not antiquarian poems about Greek gods and heroes - they are poems about the earth and its life. "The Day of the Daughter of Hades", tells how the Sicilian youth Callistes met the daughter of Hades and Proserpine, when she had risen for one day to the upper air to see the living things on the Sicilian earth, and to sing about them - not to learn the art of war, or the constitutional history of the Sicilian cities. The dignity of this story, its effectiveness and beauty, come from the real contrast between the majesty of the life of earth and the unrest of the life of man. This idea is no fiction of the poets, and it is this that gives life to the shadowy figure risen from the under world. "The Woods of Westermain" and "Earth and Man", are the most difficult poems in the book, perhaps because they have received no help from mythology. They are closely akin in their subject - the progress of man in knowledge, hindered by "his distempered devil of self", which stands between him and the secret of the life of Earth and Man. "Love in the Valley" is more easily comprehensible. The variety of images in it, the clearness with which it reflects all the aspects of the fortunate valley, give it a character of its own among pastorals.

The first of the sonnets may be quoted here:-

"LUCIFER IN STARLIGHT."

"On a starred night Prince Lucifer arose
.....
The army of unalterable law"

[quoted in
full.]

The style of Mr. Meredith's poems is as original as that of his "Comedies in Chapters". The enigmatic sentences perpetually recall the prose epigrams of "the Egoist" or "the Tragic Comedians". The "Poems of the Joy of Earth" are lyrical interludes in the comedy, reminding the audience that there are things worth attending to besides the vagaries of the actors on the stage"

W. P. KER.

(From Merry England, August 1883 pp. 316-8.
by Alice Meynell. Mrs. Meynell was the foremost woman poet of her day and when she met Meredith, years later, she became one of the most valued of his later friends. She was one of the "men and women of highest distinction" who signed the congratulatory Birthday address to Meredith in 1898).

VIEWS AND REVIEWS.

"Mr. George Meredith has produced a volume - "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth" - in which we hear the individual note, the separate voice, which is the first thing we listen for when a poet begins to sing. So long as the voice is personal and singular it does not need that the tune should be new. And Mr. Meredith's subjects are for the most part as familiar as showers and moonrise and the careering of the wind, and as fresh. There is no freshness so perfect as that of the familiarity of Nature; and with regard to the character of the note, too, it is clear that if all the poets were natural their voices would all be distinct as their faces. And Mr. Meredith is fresh because he takes the natural initiative which is a man's natural right; it is unnatural to belong to a school, unnatural to use and abuse the vocabulary which others have set in vogue. After the individuality of the note comes its quality - beautiful or not beautiful. Mr. Meredith's note is at times excessively beautiful, always interesting, and always significant.

There are no disheartening shortcomings or boundaries in these large and vigorous poems. If every poet must have one of two demerits - faults or limitations - Mr. Meredith is to be congratulated on having faults, and not limitations. To our mind the possession of faults is preferable to that of limitations. At times he frees his reader's thought, sets him above the poverties of time and place, and asks him, as Virgil asked Dante in an eternal world, "CHE PENSI?" "What thinkest thou?" Among the loveliest and most suggestive lines are those on "The Day of the Daughter of Hades," in which the ever wonderful tale of Ceres and her child is told with a mysterious passionateness:-

"He saw through leaves
The mother and daughter meet,
They stood by the chariot-wheel,
Embraced: very tall, most like
Fellow-poplars, wind-taken, that reel
Down their shivering columns and strike
Head to head, crossing throats; and apart,
For the feast of the look, they drew,

Which darkness no longer could thwart;
 And they broke together anew
 Exulting to tears, flower and bud."

This is masterly imagery and purely magical poetry. It recalls that other exquisite image of the cloud-moon and the water-moon, by which Rossetti expressed the weeping together of the mother and daughter in "Rose Mary." But Rossetti's thought was more penetrating in its emotion; Mr. Meredith's is more liberal and glorious.

Of the sonnets, the following on "Appreciation" is admirable for lucidity as well as for power of feeling and grace of metaphor:-

"Earth was not earth before her sons appeared,
 Nor beauty beauty ere young love was born:
 and thou when I lay hidden wert as morn,
 At city windows, touching eyelids bleared;
 To none by her fresh wingedness endeared;
 Unwelcome unto revellers outworn.
 I the last echoes of Diana's horn
 In woodland heard, and saw thee come, and cheered.
 No longer wert thou then mere light, fair soul!
 And more than simple duty moved thy feet.
 New colours rose in thee, from fear, from share,
 From hope effused: though not less pure a scroll
 May run lead on the heart I taught to beat:
 That change in thee, if not thyself, I claim."

We have said that this is one of the more fortunate poets who have faults. The principal of these in his case is obscurity, seldom if ever unconquerable by a little application, but sometimes profound at the first glance. Again, Mr. Meredith has a way, which many must find distasteful, of overworking a simile too precisely and insistently. This is an instance:-

"Spiral" the memorable lady terms
 Our minds' ascent: our world's advance presents
 That figure on a flat; the way of worms."

By-the-way, who is the lady quoted? Will any, of our readers tell us? The saying sounds like one of George Eliot's, though we do not remember it in her writings. With regard to metrical form, it is to be noted that Mr. Meredith uses quantity in a manner unusual in English or any modern verse. Those of his poems in which this peculiarity occurs should be read in time as music is sung. Negroes would recite them to perfection. He evidently doubts his white readers' comprehension of the rhythm intended, for he gives a guide to the scansion. This is a specimen of lines in which quantity

plays this important part:-

"Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star."

This is indeed TEMPO MARCATO; and we cannot but think the insistent rhythm is undignified. To thresh to, to march to, to rock or dance a baby to, quantitative verse is all very well; but accent is sufficient for poetry which is read in repose.

The volume of verse which bears "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth" company on our table, is Mr. Swinburne's new volume of "Roundels"-at the first glance more attractive than Mr. Meredith's, but not winning the lingering re-perusal to which the latter persuades us."

(From the Glasgow Herald, August 7, 1883, p.3.)

POEMS AND LYRICS OF THE JOY OF EARTH.

"In opening any book with the name of George Meredith on the title-page, one expects to be mystified, but one also expects something worth puzzling over. There can be no disappointment in the present volume with regard to the first expectation, whatever difference of opinion there may remain with regard to the second. "The Woods of Westermain" is a puzzle which has cost us some considerable thought, but we believe we have found the solution. It is a poem intended to show how in forest depths, as elsewhere, the mysteries of Nature can only be read by those who look with the soul. These, indeed, can find

"Glory narrowing to grace,
Grace glory magnified"

in the "Woods of Westermain" as elsewhere. But those who, without soul, "dare to enter these enchanted woods," may not

"Read their pool of vision through,
Back to hours when mind was mud,"

but remain still in the mire. In other words, the significance of things depends on the looker. He may find riches beyond measure, and all the "joys of earth," or, like Peter Bell, "the primrose by the river's brim, a yellow primrose is to him, and it is nothing

more." All this, of course, is not new, nor is it told without some rich poetic setting, and many lines which strike one, such as

"Shadowed leagues of slumbering sound"

- a photograph in fine words of the noonday hush of a summer wood.

But, unfortunately, there is far more which is utterly incomprehensible.

Take this, for example:-

"Lo, you look at Flow and Drought
Interflashed and interwrought:
Ended is begun, begun
Ended, quick as torrents run.
Young Impulsion spouts to sink:
Luridness and lustre link:
'Tis your come and go of breath:
Mirrored pants the Life, the Death:
Each of either reaped and sown:
Rosiest rosy wanes to crone.
See you so? Your senses drift."

Our senses certainly do "drift" after a few pages of this kind of thing. George Meredith does not affect oddities of style nor ransack the dictionaries for outlandish words like Browning. The very simplicity of appearance of his verse makes its actual obscurity, however, all the greater, and certainly all the more irritating. Life is too short for us to tolerate many poets who make such demands upon our time. Among the remaining contents of the volume are some lyrics of more simplicity, and therefore, to our mind, of more beauty. Among these may be cited a series of trochaic verses entitled "Love in the Valley," from which we quote the following:-

"Shy as the squirrel and wayward as the swallow,
Swift as the swallow along the river's light
Circling the surface to meet his mirrored
winglets,
Fleeter she seems in her stay than in her flight.
Shy as the squirrel that leaps among the pine-tops,
Wayward as the swallow overhead at set of sun,
She whom I love is hard to catch and conquer,
Hard, but O the glory of the winning were
she won!"

From the same poem, we take the following example of the writer's inordinate fondness for compounds:-

"Mother of the dews, dark eye-lashed twilight,
Low-lidded twilight, o'er the valley's brim,
Rohding on thy breast sings the dew-delighted
Skylark;
Clear as though the dew-drops had their voice
in him.
Hidden where the rose-flush drinks the rayless
planet -
Fountain-full he pours the spraying fountain-
showers -
Let me hear her laughter, I would have her ever
Cool as dew in twilight, the lark above the flowers."

For the rest, George Meredith is so highly gifted in many ways that we cannot but regret his special gift of ingenuity in employing language to conceal his meaning."

(From the Glasgow Herald, August 14th, 1883, p.3. This passage occurs in an article entitled "A Voyage Round the World" written on the steamship Arizona, July 21 - 29, by Moncure D. Conway. In his autobiography Conway declared that he preferred Meredith's poetry to his novels, as he was more outspoken in his verse than in his prose.)

"Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth" Such is the title of George Meredith's new volume, over which I have been dreaming away this soft July day in mid-Atlantic. Bound on a voyage round the earth, my poet at his cottage door hovers as in a mirage on the moonlit mist, and his deep eyes say, "Come back! Why wander through the World? Here are all joys of Earth. Sweet are our Surry hours; you are leaving the night-jar and the morning lark behind you; not in California will you find finer Eldorado than our golden gorse; not at the Antipodes, not in India, shall you find a world as wide as our London, with its horizons ever expanding into the past, into the Present." Poet, you plead too late! Far away now are the bowers of Old England. It may also be that needful that one should circumnavigate the Earth to win what another finds by circumnavigating a dewdrop. He must have lived long and voyaged far who can explore this little book, and even understand the Joy of Earth it sings. Therefore it is too much to hope that the millions will pause to listen to this poet who, did they know it, might set their myriad footfalls to music. In these songs, fresh from the soul of summer, George Meredith appears to me one of the few poets who greet with joy a dawn which more famous morning-stars of song meet with threnodies of fear and pain. With the unbelief revealed alike in pessimist philosophy and panic he has simply nothing to do. Take all that belongs to you, gentlemen - so he meets the sceptic and the scientist - and I will even add, all you may suspect belongs to you, myself included: what then? that skylark will sing all the vanished angels song, heaven will smile through that child's eyes bright as through the olden

Stars, and the heart of the universe will not cease to beat so long as I love. There are things that live in undiminished strength when opinions of them have passed away; nay, which are even enhanced by knowledge - like that rosy cloud on which Columbus and his mariners gazed, but which proved to be the New World. Most of our opinions will be fossil remains after a time, and it would appear that experience has gradually trained the heart of man to seek a satisfaction in the realm which poetry and art can actually build out of that heart's emotions and aspirations. The task of George Meredith is different from that assigned the poet by the Wordsworthian or any other school. It is not interpretation of nature as a pantheistic phenomenon; it is not to deal with nature as a symbolism of another and invisible, though equally material, nature. Rather it is to detach the roses of nature from their thorns, to anticipate the evolutionary work of ages and show the far final outcome of things as if present in the joy of their vision. There is no awe, no worship of hugeness and force, but of beauty, loveliness, sweetness, and in the rapture of this worship the vileness and agonies of the earth are abolished and forgotten. Let who will deal with the evil side of nature, the inhuman side, this poet will, imaginatively, create for us a world in which evil shall be fabulous as a dragon, and teach us a secret of spiritual delection by which we may surround ourselves with a harmonious order crystallised out of common quarries, like the diamond. Is not this better than to turn our May-Day evil with ravings against our age, especially as the age doesn't in the least care for our ravings? Is it not the better poetic art to show what peace, hope, joy, may be gathered as wayside blooms, and show every petal of them tinted with glow of the ancient Heavens? After saying so much, perhaps I should quote from this book enough to justify my praise; that I cannot do, but must mention one poem which seems to me particularly felicitous, It is entitled:-

"Phoebus with Admetus", and expresses the thoughts and memories of the ploughmen and shepherds after the Sun God has laid aside his disguise and his shepherd's work and left them. They bethink them of the flute's enchantment, of how the wild bees gathered on their fields, of the tales he told.

"He has been our fellow, the morning of our days!

Us he chose for housemates, and this way went

God! of whom music

And song and blood are pure,

The day is never darkened

That had thee here obscure."

"

(From The Fortnightly Review Vo. XXXIV Nov. 1883 pp 717-8, in an article entitled 'Poets of To-day' by W. L. Courtney. Courtney was an eminent author and critic. He was editor of the Fortnightly Review and was on the staff of the Daily Telegraph. Courtney selected for special praise, 'Love in the Valley', the very poem which Pattison regarded as likely to be the most popular because it was typical of the work of "the minor poet".)

Dealing with Swinburne's "Studies in Song" Courtney remarks:-

"One moral which Mr. Swinburne conveys in A Singing Lesson might be profitably taken to heart by many of our contemporary songsters - Mr. George Meredith, for example, or Mr. Frederick Myers. It is the lesson of simplicity in song:-

"Nought
In a song can be good if the turn of the verse is
Far-fetched and dear bought."

But will some of Mr. Swinburne's own songs in past volumes bear such a test?

Mr. Meredith describes the main theme of his Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth in one of his sonnets.

"I say but that this love of Earth reveals
A soul beside our own, to quicken, quell,
Irradiate, and through ruinous floods uplift."

This soul of Nature he tries to find with an ardour almost as great as that of Wordsworth, but with a totally different result. For "Natura non nisi patendo vincitur", and the soul of Mr. Meredith, which reflects the soul of things outside, is a speculum inaequale, too full of artificiality, of poetic conceits, of far-fetched circumlocutions and periphrases, to mirror with perfect fidelity the difficult simplicity of Nature. "O good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth!" - Mr. Browning is not especially a poet of Nature, but no one could better give us that attitude of patient receptivity of natural influence, in the absence of which Mr. Meredith will never make us feel the reality of his Nature-worship. In every way these poems are worthy of the author of the Egoist and the Tragic Comedians - that is to say, they give the same impression of cold brilliancy, of epigram and antithesis, and absence of native simplicity and warmth. Few readers will peruse with pleasure

(From Progress, July, 1887
pp. 218-21. by Philip Sidney (G.W. Foote),
entitled "Meredith's New Poems")

MEREDITH'S NEW POEMS.

"Mr. Meredith has at last won recognition as a brilliant novelist, but his genius as a poet is still questioned. The fact is pathetic. It shows how little the professional critics understand literature. Those who read Mr. Meredith's novels with alert and open minds, and realise their beauty and power, see that it is precisely his endowments as a fine poet which give them their profoundest charm.

Arguing whether any writer is a poet is a barren task. Time will show. Recognition comes though with halting feet. Wordsworth said that a great poet has to create the taste by which he is appreciated, and we admit that Mr. Meredith must do this. He has done it as a novelist, after long years of neglect or derision. That he will do so as a poet is only a reasonable presumption.

The present volume contains some of Mr. Meredith's finest verse. Most of the pieces have been printed in magazines, one nearly seventeen years ago, and others at intervals since. Yet the critics are terribly befogged. They make the old complaint: Mr. Meredith's muse is tempting but elusive! Evidently the critics would like to be severer, but they have allowed that the author is a man of genius, and they cannot now call him a fool. They seek refuge, therefore, in the charge of obscurity, without reflecting that he may be "dark through excess of light". Want of light is one thing; want of sight another. Critics forget that in judging an author they are judging themselves. One of them complains that the strongest poem in this volume is unintelligible. Perhaps so - to him. Does he imagine that a great poet, treating one of the subtlest themes, is to versify like Eliza Cook? Language expresses thought, and if you cannot follow the thought you will ^{not} understand the language. Mr. Meredith is not obscure. Hard he may be, but that is a relative term. His mind is intense, swift, subtle. His work shows, to use Lamb's expression of Shakespeare, a superfoetation of intellect. He has also vivid dramatic instinct. Not even Browning can follow better, if so well, the turnings and twistings.....

twistings of complex passions. Semi-conscious, he will give them speech; sub-conscious, he will draw them to the light. Dulcet rhyming is not his forte. He can write graceful tender verses, as may be seen in earlier productions; but his strength lies elsewhere. Eschewing the common, the hackneyed; leaving simple themes to lighter hands; he exhibits the workings of the brain under the forceful, but not overwhelming, stress of emotion. His genius has one great, distinguishing characteristic. It is subtlety. He sees deep, and far, and many things at once. He is not dazed by the interweaving of feelings; he keeps a firm, clear gaze, and follows them in all their windings, without losing sight of their combination.

One piece in this volume, Theodolinda, would alone prove Mr. Meredith a consummate poet. The Academy critic says it is "unintelligible as any chaunt of dancing dervish," and "after reading and re-reading carefully" he can but "vaguely conjecture" its meaning, which after all he misses. He has, of course, read Tennyson's St. Simon Stylites. Well, the psychology of the two poems is similar, though very different in development. St. Simon expresses the mingled pride and humility of a commonplace saint, while Theodolinda expresses the wild fluctuations of those feelings, from depth to height, in a passionate woman of subtle superstitious brain. Tennyson has done some fine work, but the wonderful way in which the "Red of heat, white of heat" is carried through all the action and passion of this poem is beyond the Laureate's scope.

A Preaching from a Spanish Ballad gives Mr. Meredith an opportunity of treating sexual morality, a theme he has dealt with often in his later writings. A lady, neglected by her lord, who pursues his amours abroad, succumbs to a lover who

"Seemed a very gift of heaven
To the starved of common food."

Suddenly they are interrupted by the returning husband.

"Thundered then her lord of thunders;
Burst the door, and flashing sword,
Loud disgorged the woman's title;
Condemnation in one word.

Grand by righteous wrath transfigured,
Towers the husband who provides
In his person judge and witness,
Death's black doorkeeper besides!

~~or reveals a very great and imperial right, while the warrior-king~~
lies in his tent lifeless, killed by his bride.

A READING OF EARTH

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH

1888.

Reviews:

- * The Atlantic Monthly : Volume LXI, February 1888, pp. 178-193,
by George Parsons Lathrop
- The Scots Observer, January 26, 1889 p. 274.
- x The Scottish Art Review, February 1889, pp. 263-5 by Wm. Sharp.
- The Manchester Guardian, February 4, 1889 p. 7.
- x The National Reformer, February 24, 1889, pp. 115-7 by G. W. Foote.

(By Meredith's special request no copies of the book
were sent out for review; as a result it received
little critical notice in contemporary periodicals.)

Mr. Meredith. To judge by a good many reviews of POEMS AND LYRICS
OF THE JOY OF LIFE and BALLADS AND POEMS OF TRAGIC LIFE, genuine

criticism was an unknown quantity to the reviewers. There was little or no attempt to judge these books from the author's standpoint, to discern the poet's aim, to apprehend his artistic method. The 'Poems and Lyrics' were good or bad to the reviewer as they suggested the work of this, that, or the other poet; the 'Lark Ascending' was solemnly compared with Shelley's lyric, forgetful of the circumstance that the two minstrels were not in rivalry at all; 'Phoebus with Admetus,' and 'Melampus,' suggested Mr. Matthew Arnold - why or how I know not, nor can conjecture, for whatever else George Meredith may be he is absolutely original. This method of relative appraisement - for it is not criticism - is misleading to the reader and unjust to the poet. We do not want to be told that a lyric is a failure, because it is not so thrilling as something quite distinct by Shelley, any more than we care to be informed that Burns's 'Twa Dogs' is inferior to some delicate little chanson by Musset. There is, in the science of literary criticism - if anything but the inchoate material for such science exist at present, which is open to doubt - no compromise with the philistinism of inartistic, of irrelevant, in a word, of impossible comparisons.

That Mr. George Meredith is in degree not less remarkable as a poet than as a novelist has long been maintained by a few capable judges; but there is no doubt that the same parrot-cry which clamours against the unintelligibility of his novels has affected the popularity of his verse. 'He cannot write musically, and therefore he is not a poet,' remarked some sagacious critic of the BALLADS OF TRAGIC LIFE. I need not stop to point out wherein the first clause is inadequate or liable to misconstruction: it will be sufficient to controvert it - for those who recollect the contents of the book in question - by mention only of 'The Woods of Westermain,' 'The Lark Ascending,' and 'Love in the Valley.' The last-named is, for richness of colour and what an art-critic would call mellowness of tone, and for free lilt of music, one of the most beautiful of contemporary poems. All the author's deep love and knowledge of nature, his phenomenal observation, and his polished concision, are exemplified in these 'valley' stanzas, three of which I now feel under compulsion to quote:-

has his falcon of poetry as much as his steed of prose in magic restraint - and we may be sure that so conscientious and so thorough an artist does not practise renunciation unless to some high end of art. This one may safely say, without asserting that George Meredith has, to all appearances, no vehemence of lyrical genius. It would be interesting to know just how far his curiously introspective, his restlessly searching spirit - so alert to all that is quintessential in science and philosophy, as well as to the fascinating idiosyncratic lights and shadows, and all the subtler complexities of human nature - is hampered by the urgency of his intellectual, as distinct from his purely poetic, vision. To see clearly is the divine faculty of the philosophic seer as well as of the poet; but it is the supreme characteristic of the latter that his vision transcends the ordinary limitations of the intellect, and beholds all things in a light that is not of the familiar earth about us, and that he himself can find utterance in words purged by stress of emotion into the most exquisite rhythms. Emerson, for example, was never more than the philosophic seer who saw poetically; Matthew Arnold, again, was a philosophical seer, an ethical teacher, affected to poetic utterance by a rhythmic emotion which possessed him at rare intervals, but never usurped daemonic tyranny over every nerve and fibre of his body. Between the Emersonian and the daemonic types of poetic genius, there is range enough indeed to obviate any necessity of sweeping conclusions. That Mr. Meredith could have attained as relatively high, or higher, a rank as a poet as he has done as a novelist, had he devoted himself absolutely to the art which he indubitably loves so well, and has, indeed, long so loyally served, I feel well assured. But, as it is, it is significant to find the inmost part of him, his deepest and subtlest intellectual and spiritual ideas and imaginings, enshrined in verse that is always noteworthy, and is so often memorable for its dignity and beauty.

In his new volume, the dominant intellectual note is that of a supreme and indestructible faith in the soul - in the imperishable part of man: an almost jubilant, but a serene, foreview of his ascent, and his high destinies. It is this that gives so essentially lofty and noble a tone to the book as a whole. The 'Springing To-Be' is the lure of his spirit when alive with song; for his Death is not

merely non-existent, not merely the sudden darkness at the close of day; it is an impossibility, a thing ridiculous, not disputable, the catchword of myriads who have existed but never lived - as he says in 'Seed-Time,' at once impetuous and serene, DEATH IS THE WORD OF A BOVINE DAY. There is, however, no vanity of metaphysics. Life, noble life, is the one thing essential; of but little import the mortal brood of our questionings, if we work towards the larger good:

'We children of Beneficence
Are in its being sharers;
And whither vainer sounds than Whence,
For word with such wayfarers.'

This high ethical note reaches, perhaps, its finest utterance in the noble ode entitled 'Meditation under Stars'; and to convey some idea of it in a general way, I cannot do better than quote, first, a few passages from the penultimate section, and then the closing lines. The beautiful allusion to the stars in the opening sentence must impress every reader -

'To deeper than this ball of sight
Appeal the lustrous people of the night.

So may we read, and little find them cold:
Let it but be the Lord of Mind to guide
Our eyes:
Nor dreaming on a dream; but fortified
By day to penetrate black midnight; see,
Hear, feel, outside the senses; even that we,
The specks of dust upon a mould of mould,
We who reflect those rays, though low our place,
To them are lastingly allied.

So may we read, and little find them cold;
Not frosty lamps illuming dead space,
not distant aliens, not senseless Powers.
The fire is in them whereof we are born;
The music of their motion may be ours.
Spirit shall deem them beckoning Earth and voiced
Sisterly to her, in her beams rejoiced.
Of love the grand impulsion, we behold
The love that lends her grace
Among the starry fold.

Then at new flood of customary morn,
Look at her through her showers,
Her mists, her streaming gold,
A wonder edges the familiar face:
She wears no more that robe of printed hours;
Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers.'

So far as the mere personal opinion of the present critic is concerned, he would assert that no loftier strains than these have been written since Wordsworth's 'Ode to Duty.'

It will be safe to predict that few readers of this book will repeat the echo-cry about lack of music. Music of utterance,

happy epithets, and felicities of selection where natural description is concerned, abound. 'The South-Wester' is the finest of poems to the true lord of all the winds that blow. 'Mother to Babe,' 'Woodland Peace,' 'Outer and Inner,' with its sweet complexities of rhyme and metre, and the 'Dirge in Woods,' are among the most delightful of the shorter poems. The last-named was written, and in an extended form published, some nineteen years ago; and it was, as Rossetti himself told me, the direct progenitor of his lyric 'Cloud Confines.' 'The Thrush in February' is a poem of forty octosyllabic quatrains, and is worthy of the haunting fascination of its title. In 'The Appeasement of Demeter' a novel and suggestive phase is given to an old theme, with an effect, upon the present writer, as of something definitely decorative, of an actual fresco, or heroic design in tapestry. Not that it lacks the vitality of a living thing; it might well be called the 'Joy of Life.' A remarkable poem follows it. Entitled 'Earth and a Wedded Woman,' it deals with the vague psychical experience of a child of nature, as she lies on her bed and thinks dreadfully of her long-absent lover while she listens to the pouring of the incessant rain. It does not lend itself to excerption, and is too long for present quotation. But the finest poem in the volume is the superb 'Hymn to Colour,' which, with 'Love in the Valley,' I should rank foremost among the sensuous poems of George Meredith. There is not a line that is not exquisite in beauty. There is a gorgeousness, too, which is rare with this author, even in such in one sense hueless words as

'Look now where colour, the soul's bridegroom, makes
The house of heaven splendid for the bride.'

It is almost a shame to detach portions of so perfect a poem, but it would be worse to pass on without quotation. The last six stanzas, which belong to 'Love's Song,' and are so far descriptive of Dawn, may best be excerpted. Artists, at any rate, will know how absolutely true is the unconventional inversion of epithets in the first stanza: -

'Of thee to say behold, has said adieu;
But love remembers how the sky was green,
And how the grasses glimmered lightest blue;
How saint-like grey took fervour; how the screen
Of cloud grew violet; how thy moment came
Between a blush and flame.'

Love saw the emissary eglantine
 Break wave round thy white feet above the gloom;
 Lay finger on thy star; thy raiment line
 with cherub wing and limb; wed thy soft bloom,
 Gold-quivering like sun-rays in thistle-down,
 Earth under rolling brown.

They do not look through love to look on thee,
 Grave heavenliness! nor know they joy of sight,
 Who deem the wave of rapt desire must be
 its wrecking and last issue of delight.
 Dead seasons quicken in one petal-spot
 Of colour unforget.

This way have men come out of brutishness
 to spell the letters of the sky, and read
 A reflex upon earth, else meaningless.
 With thee, O fount of the Untimed! to lead;
 Drink they of thee, thee eyeing, they unaged
 Shall on through brave wars waged.

More gardens will they win than any lost;
 The vile plucked out of them, the unlovely slain.
 Not forfeiting the beast with which they are crossed,
 To stature of the gods will they attain.
 They shall uplift their earth to meet her Lord,
 Themselves the attuning chord.

The Song had ceased: my vision with the song,
 Then of those Shadows, which one made descent
 Beside me I knew not: but Life ere long
 Came on me in the public ways, and bent
 Eyes deeper than of old; Death met I too,

And saw the dawn glow through.'

AND SAW THE DAWN GLOW THROUGH DEATH - words as noble and
 beautiful as they are characteristic.

In conclusion - though, perhaps, no worthier close could
 be than the stanza just quoted - here is the last of the few sonnets: -

WINTER HEAVENS.

'Sharp is the night, but stars with frost alive
 leap off the rim of earth across the dome.
 It is a night to make the heavens our home
 More than the nest whereto apace we strive.
 Lengths down our road each fir-tree seems a hive,
 In swarms out-rushing from the golden comb.
 They waken waves of thought that burst to foam:
 The living throb in me, the dead revive.
 Yon mantle clothes us: there, past mortal breath,
 Life glistens on the river of the death.
 It folds us, flesh and dust; and have we knelt,
 Or never knelt, or eyed as kine the springs
 Of radiance, the radiance enrings:
 And this is the soul's haven to have felt.'

If Mr. George Meredith will speak to us oftener in his vocation
 as poet, as VATES, he will strengthen immeasurably the bond which
 already unites him in sympathy with all who love high thinking, and
 never better than when wedded with words transfigured by the spirit
 of poetry.

WILLIAM SHARP."

(From The National Reformer, February 24, 1889, pp. 115- 7 by G.S.Foote. This review considers Meredith's didacticism in poetry).

A READING OF EARTH.

"Without sharing Mr. Swinburne's fierce contempt for Shelley as a critic, one may venture to question a dictum in the beautiful preface to PROMETHEUS UNBOUND. "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence", says the author of that majestic masterpiece; and he goes on to say that "nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse". Precisely so; the remark is almost a truism. But what is its essential relation to didactic poetry? What, indeed, IS didactic poetry? If, as the etymology of the epithet implies, it is poetry which teaches, or whose object is to teach, it may still be poetry of the very highest order. Set aside the plot of any one of Shakspeare's great tragedies, and see whether many of its most poetical passages do not consist in reflexions on man and nature, or rather man IN nature. That last transcendent outburst of Prospero, matchless as it is for grandeur of scope and felicity of expression, is indubitably - to use Mr. Arnold's definition of ALL poetry - a criticism of life. Darwin or Spencer might say the same thing, but how differently they would say it! Even the dreariest pulpit-droner might enforce, in HIS style, the very lesson which Shakspeare carries to our souls in one of his skyey sentences. It is obvious, then, that a man may teach as a poet as well as a preacher. Yet the poet will never adopt the preacher's method, and this is perhaps what Shelley meant. He will not point the commonplace lessons of selfish prudence, but work upon our higher faculties which consciously connect us with nature and mankind. He will appeal to imagination, sympathy, and conscience, lift us out of ourselves except as parts of the great whole, show us - as Wordsworth says - "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science", and steep us in "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge". He will never use intellect without emotion, or the sensual without the super-sensual, but always exhibit truth through beauty and beauty through truth. Let him descend from this elevation, and he becomes a prosaic moraliser, whose saws are "tedious as a thrice-told tale, vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man".

Not in Shelley's sense, but in a better, Mr. Meredith's poetry

is largely didactic. The very title of his latest volume shows he has something to reveal; and the revelation, I may add, is worthy of a careful hearing. No other hearing, indeed, is of the slightest use. Mr. Meredith's meaning is not so clear as a joker's grin, nor does he write those mellifluous lines which too often lack meaning, or carry the lazy reader luxuriously along in oblivion of the meaning they possess. He cultivates no verbal graces, and is never meretricious. He merely aims at giving utterance to his spirit, and your spirit must match itself with his to grasp the message. Justice perhaps, requires it to be said that Mr. Meredith has not, as a literary craftsman, mastered the TECHNIQUE of verse as he has mastered the TECHNIQUE of prose. He is a consummate artist in prose, but his verse sometimes displays faulty workmanship. Probably he has given his best strength to his great works of fiction, and devoted less artistic force to the technical perfection of his poems. Great minds, too, tend to become more tense with strenuous practice, and this wars with the spirit of melody. What fluent grace there is in Shakspeare's earlier comedies, what knotted terseness in the later tragedies! Those who have only read Mr. Meredith's recent verse will be surprised to find what exquisite and simple beauty there is in some of the poems he published in 1851. Thirty-eight years ago! To think that all those years his mighty spirit has been working among us, and is only now obtaining a moderate recognition! The recognition, indeed, is SO moderate that I understand Mr. Meredith does not think it worth while to favor the critics with copies of his new volume. Those gentlemen still affect the dulcet rhymers of platitudes, the (PACE Mr. Morris) idle singers of an empty day.

Mr. Meredith's gospel - if I may employ that much prostituted word - is like Mr. Browning's in one thing, and in one thing only - its lusty optimism. But Mr. Browning's is the optimism of Theism, while Mr. Meredith's is the optimism of Evolution. Both recognize the dark evil of life, but one regards it as an obscure part of God's wise plan, and the other as an inevitable concomitant of man's upward strife from sense to soul. Mr. Browning trusts in faith, Mr. Meredith in reason. Ruthlessly stripping life of all illusions, accepting the hard conditions of Nature, and seeking no consolations

"from the bosom of magical skies," he defies that despair which is mostly the cry of selfhood, and holds that Mother Earth is reaching forward to braver and wiser offspring, ever treading down insurgent sensations and pushing Reason into the royal seat of power. She spins no riddles, it is we who spin them and weary ourselves in solving them. But she allows us aspiration, and

"The dream is an atmosphere;
A scale still ascending to knit
The clear to the loftier Clear.
'Tis Reason herself, tiptoe
At the ultimate bound of her wit,
On the verges of Night and Day."

The longest and most important poem in this volume, entitled "A Faith on Trial", contains the essence of Mr. Meredith's evangel. The poem is autobiographic; the teacher speaks from his own profound experience. He goes forth on a May morning, leaving a darkened home, where the crowned Shadow poises his dart over the head of the beloved wife. The aspects of nature are noted with an eye such as no other living man possesses. Fresh life is bursting forth, knowing nothing of sorrow. The sight of "league-long sun upon seas" reminds him of the voyage he went with her to her birthland France. He passes the spot where they looked down together on their "household's twinkle of light". Blackbird and thrush are choiring, but he walks on with his grief. He sees parasite growths, and then a strong yew tree which repels them.

"Firm on the hard knotted knee,
He stood in the crown of his dun;
Earth's toughest to stay her wheel:
Under whom the full day is night;
Whom the century-tempests call son,
Having striven to rend him in vain."

Finally he lights on "the pure wild-cherry in bloom". With her he had hailed it pure of the pure, and now it medicines his sick soul. She and it become one to his thought. He retraces their past in memory, in verse too splendid to cite piecemeal, too tender to touch with a rough hand. Reaching home again he finds the country youngsters with their maypole. Their natural music, as they skip off with their pence, puts him in tune with the hungers of his kind.

"Do readings of earth draw thence,
Then a concord deeper than cries
Of the Whither whose echo is Whence,
To jar unanswered, shall rise
As a fountain-jet in the mind
Bowed dark o'er the fallen and strewn."

Unwitting where it might lead,
 How it came, for the anguish to cease,
 And the Questions that sow not nor spin,
 This wisdom, rough-written, and black,
 As of veins that from venom bleed,
 I had with the peace within;
 Or patience, mortal of peace,
 Compressing the surgent strife
 In a heart laid open, not mailed,
 To the last blank hour of the rack,
 When struck the dividing knife:
 When the hand that never had failed
 In its pressure to mine hung slack."

From this point the poet speaks to us direct. He finds his dream of the life beyond ashes a delusion. Nature whispers no corroboration; it is a mere flash through the mist, breath on a buckler of steel. Nay, there is a selfishness in the dream.

"If we strain to the farther shore,
 We are catching at comfort dear."

Earth responds not to our craving for the permanence of the Present:

"She wrestles with our old worm
 Self in the narrow and wide:
 Relentless quencher of lies,
 With laughter she pierces the brute;
 And hear we her laughter peal,
 'Tis Light in us dancing to scour
 The loathed recess of his dens;
 Scatter his monstrous bed,
 And hound him to harrow and plow.

.

Nor least is the service she does,
 That service to her may cleanse
 The well of the Sorrows in us;
 For a common delight will drain
 the rank individual fens
 Of a wound refusing to heal
 While the old worm slavers its root."

That is the grand lesson of Mr. Meredith's philosophy. He smiles at the Legends which sweep nature aside and cry for opiate boons from heaven; he bids us stand by Mother Earth, accept the lot she deals us, and share in her beneficent, over-upward movement.

"Hard Weather" teaches a lesson to the sentimentalists. The poet describes the blustering East wind on a Spring morning inimitably, and then asks the meaning of such a day, when the "fierce angel of the air" exacts a wrestle for our very breath of life. Is there rich significance,

"Not otherwise than with those tides
 Of pleasure on the sunned expanse,
 Whose flow deludes, whose ebb derides?"

Yes, the life at ease drifts, but "the sharpened life commands its course". Nature honors strength, and there is no strength without

struggle.

"Nor broken for us shows the mould
When muscle is in mind renewed:
Though farther from her nature rude
Yet nearer to her spirit's hold:
And though of gentler mood serene,
Still forceful of her fountain-jet."

The "South Wester" is a poem of remarkable beauty, but it should be read entire, and hardly allows of quotation. "The Thrush in February" opens in a fine rapture, and contains some characteristic reflexions. The following verses refer to London:

"The City of the smoky fray;
A prodded ox, it drags and moans;
Its Morrow no man's child; its Day
A vulture's morsel beaked to bones.

It strives without a mark for strife;
It feasts beside a famished host;
The loose restraint of wanton life,
The threatened penance in the ghost!"

Yet in this vast metropolis of all extremes the battle of progress urges, and Mr. Meredith looks forward more than hopefully to the day of "Just reason based on valiant blood" - a noble ideal perfectly expressed.

"Earth and a Wedded Woman" bears Mr. Meredith's stamp in every (unintelligible, but those who comprehend it will recognise) line. To many readers, I fear, it will be its depth and subtlety.

This is appositely followed by a dainty little song of "Mother to Baba". The lesson of "Woodland Peace" will not be lost on the lovers of nature. "The question whither" should be plain enough to what James Thomson called "the laziest and haziest of animals - the general reader". Two lines, at least, strike a lofty note:

"Our questions are a mortal brood,
Our work is everlasting."

"Outer and Inner" and "Nature and Life" pursue the same vein, and are followed by a perfect "Dirge in Woods":

"A wind sways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that glow
On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there.

The pine-tree drops its dead;
They are quiet, as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even we,
Ever so."

If I remember rightly, this piece formed one of a series which appeared in the FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW many years ago. Some magnificent lines beginning "The Lover of Life" have not been included in any of Mr. Meredith's collections of verse, but I earnestly hope he will give them a place in a future volume.

"The Appeasement of Demeter" is a classical subject, though its essence is perennial. Mr. Meredith treats it with astonishing power. The imagery is most intense, and the verse is close-wrought like a coat of mail. Another glorious poem, the "Hymn to Colour", might challenge comparison with anything in our language. Quotation is impossible; it would be giving a few bars from a mighty symphony.

Of the "Epitaphs" which close the volume I can only say that dexterity outmatches genius in this form of composition. Pope would certainly beat Shakspeare in furnishing the tombs in Westminster Abbey with suitable inscriptions. I take Mr. Meredith's epitaphs as Homeric noddings, and pass to his four fine sonnets, the last of which, "Winter Heavens", contains a line -

"The living throb in me, the dead revive" -
which would add a gem to the kingliest poet's crown. "Society" sums up human evolution, and "Earth's Preference" and "The Wisdom of Eld" point a common moral. I give the last in full.

"We spend our lives in learning pilotage,
And grow good steersmen when the vessel's crank!
Gap-toothed he spake, and with a tottering shank
Sidled to gain the sunny bench of Age.
It is the sentence which completes that stage;
A testament of wisdom reading blank.
The seniors of the race, on their last plank,
Pass mumbling it as nature's final page.
These, bent by such experience, are the band
Who captain young enthusiasts to maintain
What things we view, and Earth's degree withstand,
Lest dreaded Change, long dammed by dull decay,
Should bring the world a vessel steered by brain,
And ancients musical at close of day."

Shelley would not have abhorred such "didactic poetry" as this. What vision, what intellect, what wisdom! How sanative the lesson for our age! Whoever studies this single sonnet will understand Mr. Meredith's greatness; and if he has not already made acquaintance with this potent spirit, he will thank me for introducing him to a noble poet, a profound and subtle thinker, and a master of every resource of our bounteous English tongue."

POEMS

THE EMPTY PURSE

WITH ODES TO THE COMIC SPIRIT

TO YOUTH IN MEMORY

AND VERSES

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH

1892.

JUMP TO GLORY JANE

BY GEORGE MEREDITH

Edited and Arranged

By Harry Quilter.

With forty-four designs invented

drawn and written

By Laurence Housman.

1892.

Reviews:

- * The Daily Chronicle, October 29, 1892, p. 3 : reprinted in Retrospective Reviews by Richard le Gallienne, London, 1896, Vo. 1 pp. 183-9.
 - * The Saturday Review, December 17, 1892, pp. 718-20
 - * The English Illustrated Magazine, September 1893 pp. 900-8, in "On Some Living English Poets", by A. W. Quiller-Couch.
 - The Hibbert Journal, April 1916 pp. 613-26 "The Empty Purse. A Meredithian Study for the Times", by the Rev. James Moffatt.
-
- * The Times, October 27, 1892, p. 12.
 - The Daily Chronicle, October 29, 1892, p. 3 by Richard le Gallienne.

" POEMS :

THE EMPTY PURSE,
WITH ODES TO THE CONIC SPIRIT
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1892.

"JUMP - TO - GLORY JANE."

1892.

(From the Daily Chronicle, Saturday, October 29, 1892.
p.3 by Richard Le Gallienne, who was one of Meredith's most
enthusiastic admirers. His book "George Meredith, Some
Characteristics" was published in 1900. The article was
reprinted in Retrospective Reviews (Vol.1 pp 183-9, 1896)

MEREDITH'S NEW POEMS.

"The appeal of Mr. Meredith's later poetry, at any rate, is entirely to the faithful. Coming to a new volume of his poems they know exactly what to expect. The casual reader frots and fumes. These are not poems. They are simply impenetrable night streaked with fine flashes of lightening. Exactly. That is all the experienced Meredithian expects, and consequently he reads contentedly, picking up what crumbs he may from the master's table. Doubtless he often sighs for the time when the poet was content with simple beauty, as in "Love in the Valley", and the comparatively plain but majestic English of "Modern Love"; but that seems no reason for his rejecting whatever of strength and beauty is still vouchsafed him. Like Vivien, he will not throw away his whole apple because of a few pitted specks, And he, at least, well knows that he has his reward. He finds it in such a passage as this, which is surely a beautiful description of childhood, the childhood in this case, of the average young British egoist:-

"There the young chief of the animals were
A likeness to heavenly hosts, unaware
Of his love of himself; with the hours that leap.
In a dingle away from the rutted high road,
Around him the earliest throstle and merle,
Our human smile between milk and aleop,
Effervescent of Nature he crowed.
Fair was that season; furl over furl
The banners of blossom; a dancing floor
This earth; very angels the clouds; and fair

1. The first of these is the fact that the
 2. Government has been unable to secure the
 3. necessary funds to carry out its policy.
 4. The second is the fact that the Government
 5. has been unable to secure the necessary
 6. funds to carry out its policy.
 7. The third is the fact that the Government
 8. has been unable to secure the necessary
 9. funds to carry out its policy.
 10. The fourth is the fact that the Government
 11. has been unable to secure the necessary
 12. funds to carry out its policy.

There is no truly original idea in this passage of this strange
 following sentence, a sort of infinite's end, which has been
 to. Moreover in a study of this text to that in which is
 then created and is. It is not really a sort of original
 intention or result. It is the same original intention
 of a later intention. Both in intention and in. However, but
 certainly in it. Finally, the way to it should be by the
 explanation for the way in which the original nature of
 explanation is not beyond the extent of the action. It
 is in some possible for there to be nothing at all to do so,
 but only to have infinite things of itself. Almost every word
 is in fact with such explanation's character, and could be
 to say, without the least doubt the explanation, and, "the other".
 explanation with it to the explanation, it is under the the
 unbroken border drawn by the way. There is a way to the
 of the end.

[illegible]

It is, perhaps, fairly safe to quote such a phrase without comment, though this comment is in the British direction. It is certainly not worth while to identify ourselves as, there is still to tell the comment to order back to the subject in of the first two items. 1. Marshall examines this part of the "very" word on 12 forms to our action analysis and the content. In a book, there are still the action and which significantly have nothing to do with the word.

"In the days of David the Jews were
in the land of the Philistines
and the Philistines were in the land of the Jews."

[illegible]

- Mr. Meredith's constant lesson - have they any chance of leading sane and useful existences:-

"Forlorn earth,
 Infatuate, young giant, then fortune blind!
 And then cast on a caving fact,
 To nourish thy planted worth.
 And think of thy privilege, mingle with youth,
 To have sight of the hardlong time,
 Once fouling thee, jumping the dip!
 As the coin of thy purse poured out:
 As a child's holiday past:
 Rubbing shoulder to shoulder, as only the back
 Of the world can be read, by necessity urged.
 For witness, that blinkers are they the look
 From the side of the prince or the millionaire!
 They see but the fish they attract,
 The hangers on then converged:....."

The reader will not have some smiling that meaning
 to attach to "the roll of his list off the cliff?" "The
 Empty Purse" is briefly a reason against fortune - full of
 Mr. Meredith's radiant radicalism, his beliefs in truth, his
 faith in "earth", in expression frequently obscure, but lit
 up by many a vivid, even lovely, line and occasionally,
 passage. Looking into the future, Mr. Meredith with un-
 derstood faith, thus beautifully prophetic -

"A horn beyond morning, beyond all reach
 Of emotional aim at the stretch to unfold:
 A filament passing our visible blue.
 To those having naught to reflect it, 'tis naught;
 To those who are misty, 'tis mist on the beach
 From the billow withdrawing; to those who see
 Earth, our mother, in thought,
 Her spirit it is, our boy."

Of the many originals of thought and of beauty with which
 the poem abounds, here are a few taken at random:-

"He strutted, a cock; he bellowed, a bull;
 He rolled him, a dog, in dirt.
 There are giants to slay, and they call for their
 Jack."

..... a nursery Past.
 My brain democratic be king of the host.
 A Conservative youth! who the cream-bowl
 drained
 Aspiring ashamed to be lost as they live.

Peace,
 Our lullaby word for glory.
 There are those whom we push from the path
 with respect,
 Now to that older

..... in his day he was not all wrong.
 Unto some fountained south he strove, and was
 wrecked.

He assembled to share with a company of share."

'Tis known how the permanent never is writ
In blood of the passions.

I can hear a faint crow
Of the cock of fresh mornings, far, far, yet distinct.
Keep the young generations in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house!"

Surely if the book contained nothing more than these phrases it were worth sifting. And there is one more of fine significance which we must not miss - Mr. Meredith's symbolical test of new wisdom:-

"Is it accepted of Song?
Does it sound to the mind through the ear,
Right sober, pure sane? has it disciplined feet?
Thou wilt find it a test severe:
Unerring whatever the theme.
Rings it for Reason a melody clear."

The more one ponders this test the more suggestive it becomes - by no means is it merely fantastical, though, in the deepest sense, it has a touch of mysticism. There are several other poems in the volume on which we could like to have dwelt - especially the touching ode to "Youth in Memory", fuller of "simple beauty" than any poem in the volume, especially rich in these lovely glamorous descriptions of nature in which Mr. Meredith has no rival.

"Despite our feeble hold on this green home,
And the vast outer strangeness void of dome.
..... the arrowy eagle of the height
becomes the little bird that hops to feed,"

are lines descriptive of age with a very moving pathos. But of course, Mr. Meredith's philosophy of age is as robust as his philosophy of everything. Accept the conditions, and the compensations are always ready, is his constant lesson. And so to age. Be content to be old, age not a mere mockery of youth, live in your children, and in the thought that you are "one step above the animal", for such is Mr. Meredith's idea of the evolutionary value of living. Long ago he told us -

"How from flesh unto spirit man grows
Even here on the sod, under sun."

We have but space for a few words on the much discussed "Jump-to-Glory Jane". It is included in Mr. Meredith's own volume, as also in Mr. Quilter's reprint. Mr. Quilter has doubtless a right to republish the poem, or he would not

have done so - he has, he says, Mr. Meredith's consent, but that, none the less, condones the impertinence - in the original and the acquired sense of the word - of his preface. As criticism it is worth little, being mainly an arrangement of platitudes; and as a autobiography it is unnecessary.

The journalistic beginnings of some writers would doubtless be interesting, but we confess Mr. Quilter's leave us cold.

Candidly, we didn't want Mr. Quilter's reminiscences. Besides, he makes far too much of a poem which is certainly not among Mr. Meredith's conspicuous successes. "Jump-to-Glory Jane"

has been inaccurately described as a satire on the Salvation Army. Indeed the word "satire" is equally inaccurate. It is rather, on the contrary, a sympathetic study of one of those curious aberrations of religious idealism of which "the Shakers" and the Salvation Army are examples, with a certain under-current of that ironic humour which usually flavours Mr. Meredith's characterisations.

This verse gives one an idea of what Jane was aiming, or rather jumping, at:-

"In jumps that said, Beware the pit!
More eloquent than speaking it -
That said, Avoid the boiled, the roast,
The heated nose on face of ghost,
Which comes of drinking; up and o'er
The flesh with me! did Jane implore."

And the last verse leaves one with no doubt of Mr. Meredith's sympathetic intention:-

"Her end was beautiful; one sigh,
She jumped a foot when it was nigh.
A lily in a linen clout
She looked when they had laid her out.
It is a lily-light she bears
For England up the ladder-stairs."

As a study of spital aberration the poem is of interest; as a grotesque it achieves some measure of success; but as a poem, with the exception of an odd verse or two, it is by no means satisfactory. The expression is too brusque, and the meaning not nearly so clear as it could easily have been.

Mr. Houseman's illustrations are in the manner of the modern mystic-realistic school. They seem a curious blend of Mr. Strang and Mr. Ricketts. For many they will thus be so many irritations but for anyone who tries to enjoy all schools, some two or three of them will have a ready appeal."

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1892.

(From The Saturday Review, December 17, 1892, page 718.
Under "Reviews" entitled "The Empty Purse"*)

"The reviewer who happens to know Latin, and therefore understands the meaning of *Cui bono*, must always be rather tempted to apply that venerable but ill-treated phrase in reviewing a volume of Mr. Meredith's poems, supplying not fruit but erit. Whom will such a review profit? But to enter into such inquiries only leads to madness. It is better to cultivate the garden simply and sans phrase. In the present volume there are a dozen or fourteen poems - four of which occupy some five-sixths of the total space. Supposing that some one - a competent some one - opened it without having ever read any of the author's verse before, he would, like a well-conducted person, read the first poem first. It runs thus:-

WIND ON THE LYRE.

"That was the chirp of Ariel
You heard, as overhead it flew,
The farther going more to dwell,
And wing our green to wed our blue;
And whether note of joy or knell,
Not his own Father-singer knew;
Nor yet can any mortal tell,
Save only how it shivers through;
The breast of us a sounded shell,
The blood of us a lighted dew."

He would then (always supposing him of competence) experience a great delight and an almost greater puzzlement. He would say,

"Those last two lines are perfect; allow for a little mannerism, and

*The Empty Purse; and other Poems. By George Meredith, London :
Macmillan & Co. 1892.

they cannot be improved. You can't beat them : it is only too probable that you can't equal them. The mood of ivresse with beautiful objects, natural or artistic, is described there once for all as it has not been described before, as it will not be described again. This is the kind of man you can recommend to a friend to delight him or to an enemy to confound him. I shall have no small joy of this book". And then he will put the said book down and begin to doubt and shiver. "Yes", he will say, "9 and 10 are superb; 1 and 2 are all right, so are 7 and 8. But how about 3-6? Of course I know what they mean; of course they mean the right thing; but is there not something wrong about the expression? Is not the phrase of 3 clumsy, the imagery of 4 outre, the grammar of 5 awkward, the matter of 6 doubtful and irrelevant? Why these conundrums? Is the poet unable to express himself simply and greatly? Is he able, but chooses out of mere wilfulness to hide and distort his expression? Is he doing it of malice prepense to puzzle one kind of fool? Is he doing it of weakness to please another kind? And so our competent innocent is left in shallows and in miseries of doubt till the last couplet comes once more to his relief, and assures him that this Todgers's can certainly do it when it chooses. There is no possible mistake about that.

We half envy and half do not envy the successive sensations of the hypothetical reader as he proceeds with the somewhat short gross of pages which make up the book. We do not think that he will have much doubt about Mr. Meredith's meaning anywhere. Just as we never succeeded in discovering that obscurity of Mr. Browning which was so much vaunted and descried by turns, seeing that every person of brains could understand Mr. Browning well enough, and that the fools did not matter, so we are unable to blame this new cryptographic style for concealment of meaning, much less for meaninglessness. The meaning is there all right enough. "The Empty Purse", for instance, itself, the title poem, the longest and the most Meredithian in superfluity of verbal gymnastics, is a straightforward, and, on the whole, a sound criticism of life enough, if you must have criticisms of life in poetry.

It is led up to and its meaning is helped by a second partly exquisite lyric, "The Youthful Quest". We would undertake to paraphrase it all in prose which the wayfaring man might read, without missing a point, and at no very exorbitant length. Even the wayfaring man cannot mistake "Jump to Glory Jane", and he must be a very chuckleheaded wayfaring man if he cannot understand "Youth in Memory", for all its mannerism. "The Comic Spirit" may puzzle him a little more; but we can assure him that it also is not plus raide que ça. You have got but to unhusk and unshell it, and there it is.

"But", says our innocent (and really we do not know what to answer), "why this unconscionable allowance of shell and husk? Why give me my poetry like this; why, when my breast is a shell that tingles for sounding, my blood a dew that is ready to burst into light, apply your plectrum and your torch in this fashion of all others? -

"But first, that the poisonous of thee be purged,
Go into thyself, strike Earth.
She is there, she is felt in a blow struck hard.
Thou findest a pugilist countering quick,
Cunning at drives where thy shutters are barred;
Not, after the studied professional trick,
Blue-sealing; she brightens the sight. Strike Earth,
Antaeus, young giant, whom fortune trips!
And thou com'st on a saving fact,
To nourish thy planted worth.
Be it clay, flint, mud, or the rubble of chips,
Thy roots have grasp in the stern-exact:
The redemption of sinners deluded! the last
Dry handful, that bruises and saves.
To the common big heart are we bound right fast,
When our Mother admonishing nips
At the nakedness bare of a clout,
And we crave what the commonest craves."

"O Mr. Meredith!" innocens loquitur, "you remark yourself,

"Does it knock too hard at thy head if I say"

something? I reply : No, it does not knock too hard. By why are we to be on these knocking terms? Why, instead of comfortably feeding me with the beef of which you have such good store, chuck it at me, bones and all, as if you were a Dane in a byrnie and I were Archbishop Alphege? You have celebrated generously the virtues of good wine. Would you be grateful to any one who took a bottle of '51 port, or '70 claret, and whirled it, bottle and all, about your brains? Let us in the name, not of Mars, but of Bacchus, Apollo, and virorum, have

our/

our wine decanted and our poetry served ready to sip!"

Sic innocens. We have no doubt Mr. Meredith knows what to reply to him; we very frankly admit that we do not. We can only say that he must take his Mr. Meredith as he finds him, and that he may be, on the whole, thankful that he gets him. For ourselves we would, even if the kernel were worse than it is, read ten "Empty Purses" for the sake of one "Wind on the Lyre", and a dozen odes to the "Comic Spirit", even if they contained less fine things than this, for the "Night of Frost in May". Let anybody find fault who will with the following passage; but let him know at the same time that his fault-finding is due to wretchedness of most unclean desperation in him at never having felt what Mr. Meredith describes:-

"In this shrill hush of quietude,
The ear conceived a severing cry.
Almost it let the sound elude,
When chuckles three, a warble shy,
From hazels of the garden came,
Near by the crimson-windowed farm.
They laid the trance on breath and frame,
A prelude of the passion-charm.

Then soon was heard, not sooner heard
Than answered, trebled, more
Voice of an Eden in the bird
Renewing with his pipe of four
The sob : a troubled Eden, rich
In throb of heart : unnumbered throats

Flung upward at a fountain's pitch,
The fervour of the four long notes,
That on the fountain's pool subside,
Exult and ruffle and upspring:
Endless the crossing multiplied
Of silver and of golden string.
There chimed a bubbled underbrew
With witch-wild spray of vocal dew.

It seemed a single harper swept
Our wild wood's inner chords and waked
A spirit that for yearning ached
Ere men desired and joyed or wept.
Or now a legion ravishing
Musician rivals did unite

In love of sweetness high to sing
The subtle song that rivals light;
From breast of earth to breast of sky;
And they were secret, they were high:
A hand the magic might disperse;
The magic swung my universe."

But can we possibly rebuke in terms as harsh him who should object to more than one passage, or one score of passages elsewhere? We really do not think we can. The sense, as was said above, is sound enough.

But/

But the cookery of the sense - the expression - is all wrong. It is as either done too much or not done enough.

We are very glad to see in this book two military-political pieces - "To Colonel Charles" and "England before the Storm" - which have the root of the matter in them, and are frankly and forcibly put, the second especially. "Tardy Spring" is only inferior to the "Night of Frost in May". In short, there is nothing bad in the book; there is only good per se, and good in masquerade.

It is, probably, quite hopeless to ask Mr. Meredith why he chooses to masquerade at all. It may be a just punishment for the fools who long ago would neither understand nor admire him. It may be an ungodly private satisfaction to him, as to many, to say "Pape Satan" and "Rafel Mai", and other things, not understood of the people. It is, no doubt, a great joy to the other fools - the old fools turned inside out - who gape after everything that Mr. Meredith chooses to say, and are all the more convinced of the blessedness of Mesopotamia the more absolutely unbathed they are either in Tigris or in Euphrates. But is it not rather a pity even from these points of view, as well as a much greater one, and a great injustice to boot, from a point of view much better worth taking? What did the fools who erst (and partly, now) would not buy or read Mr. Meredith matter? They punished themselves; not him. What do the fools who now go into ecstasies over his weakest points matter? Their admiration does him considerably more harm than the other's contempt; and, besides, even if he were intelligible with ease, it would make very little difference to them; they would not understand him any the more. Lastly, it has been observed of the ancients that it is not good perpetually to say "Pape Satan", and so forth, for there comes a time when you find a difficulty in saying anything else.

On the other hand, there is now, we believe, a not inconsiderable body of tolerably elect persons who have the highest appreciation of what Mr. Meredith chooses to give them, as he can give it when he chooses; and who, while perfectly able to understand what he chooses to give them when he is in the other mood, are sincerely vexed to see

catechizing, Mr. Meredith wrote, "Yes, they are a satire, but one of the pictures of our England as well. Remember Mrs. Girling and her following, and the sensations of Jane, with her blood at the spin with activity, warranted her feeling of exaltation. An English middle-class (Blavitsky (? Blavatsky) maniac would also be instructive although less pathetic, than poor Jane". The truth, perhaps, is that Mr. Meredith has attempted to embalm, as it were, in doggerel one of the curiosities of religious mania, and that for whatever there is of grotesqueness or pathos in the tale the reality and not the writer is responsible. Mr. Quilter, besides an interpretation of the poem which seems to us rather far-fetched, contributes a criticism of Meredith's general style which does not differ appreciably from the current estimate of the novelist. Mr. Housman, the artist, has discharged his difficult task well. His outlines are quaint without being "burlesque", and they reflect something of the essential sadness of the episode."

(From The English Illustrated Magazine, September 1893 pp.900-908. In "Reviews and Reminders" by A. T. Quiller Couch. Sir A. T. Quiller Couch the well-known novelist and essayist was appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1912.)

II. On Some Living English Poets.

Section V.

"Mr. le Gallienne, almost at the beginning of his career, gave us a clever and sympathetic "appreciation" - that is the latest word, it seems - of George Meredith. And Mr. Meredith, one guesses, is the very man to rejoice in Mr. Le Gallienne's growing strength of song; not only because it has found nutriment in the study of his own methods, but because our great novelist's heart is always with the young. That which he calls "the cry of the conscience of Life" -

"Keep the young generations in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house."

- has been the note of all his recent writings, of "One of Our Conquerors" no less than of his latest small volume of verse. His own modest estimate of his poesy he condenses, I believe, in the phrase

"piping/

an Englishman, with a faculty for letters not often excelled in our time, play tricks with his genius instead of putting it to the worthy work which it can do so well. If Mr. Meredith really thinks that he cannot speak well, except when he makes "surprise packets" of his speech, he is the most unfortunate, and the most signal, instance of misplaced modesty that we ever met, nay, that we ever heard of. We have known people who would persist in doing what they could not do, but it is very seldom that one finds a man who deliberately abstains from doing what he can do, or prefers to make a chef d'oeuvre in-gonnu of it when he has done it."

(From The Times : Thursday, October 27, 1892 page 12.
Under "Books of the Week".)

"The literary budget of the past week is considerably more remarkable for quantity than quality, and from this reproach it is not saved by the publication, in book-form, of some curious verses by Mr. George Meredith, entitled Jump to Glory Jane. These, which appeared two or three years ago in the now defunct Universal Review, are now reprinted in a small volume eked out by the editorial and prefatory labours of Mr. Harry Quilter and the pictorial embellishments of Mr. Lawrence Housman (Sonnenschein). "Jump to Glory Jane" has been pardonably taken for a satire upon the Salvation Army. This, it now appears, is wrong; Jane was suggested by Mrs. Girling, of the New Forest. Much difference of opinion, too has been provoked by the question whether the poem was serious or satirical, grave or flippant, pathetic or farcical. Mr. Meredith himself did not feel quite certain on this point; he first enjoined Mr. Quilter that "whoever does it (viz., the illustrations) should be warned against giving burlesque outlines. It is a grave narration of events in English country (? life). Jane, though a jumping, is a thoughtful woman. She has discovered that the circulation of the blood is best brought about by a continual exercise, and conduces to happy sensations, which are to her as the being of angels in her frame. She has wistful eyes in a touching, but bony face". In reply to further

"piping in a corner". But the corner at any rate is sufficiently wide to include all those who, living in close communion with nature, have penetrated to the inner shrine of her beauty and learned her bravest lesson. Here is the summing-up of that lesson:-

"I promise not more, save that feasting will come
To a mind and a body no longer inversed;
The sense of large charity over the land;
Earth's wheaten of wisdom dispensed in the rough,
And a bell ringing thanks for a sustenance meal
Through the active machine : lean fare
But it carries a sparkle!"

And for the delights that nature will afford to spirit and senses so temperately at one with her, let us turn to that lovely poem, "Night of Frost in May".

"With splendour of a silver day,
A frosted night had opened May;
And on that plumed and armoured night,
As one close temple hove on wood,
Its border leafage virgin white
Remote down air an owl hallooed.
The black twig dropped without a twirl;
The bud in jewelled grasp was nipped;
The brown leaf cracked a scorching curl;
A crystal off the green leaf slipped.
Across the track of rimy tan
Some busy thread at whiles would shoot;
A limping minnow-rillet ran
To hang upon an icy foot."

A Volume of Rich. le Gallienne's poetry "English Poems" is reviewed in this article - favourably "The seal of the Muse is on all his work".

SELECTED POEMS

BY GEORGE MEREDITH.

1897.

Reviews:

- The St. James's Gazette, September 21, 1897, p. 5.
 The Daily Chronicle, September 24, 1897, p. 3.
 The Daily Mail, September 24, 1897, p. 3.
 The Globe, September 27, 1897, p. 2.
 The Leeds Mercury, September 27, 1897, p. 2.
 The Scotsman, September 27, 1897, p. 3.
 The Glasgow Herald, September 30, 1897, p. 7.
 The Independent and Nonconformist, September 30, 1897, p. 216.
 The Standard, October 1, 1897, p. 6.
 * The Academy, October 2, 1897, pp. 253-4.
 The Lady's Pictorial, October 2, 1897, p. 412.
 The Newsagent, October 2, 1897, p. 2.
 The Worcester Journal, October 2, 1897, p. 6.
 The Manchester Courier, October 6, 1897, p. 3.
 * The Saturday Review, October 9, 1897, pp. 393-5.
 The Speaker, October 9, 1897 pp. 407-8; and October 16, pp. 433-4
 by A. T. Quiller-Couch.
 The Westminster Gazette, October 11, 1897 p. 2, by Richard le Gallienne.
 The Liverpool Daily Post, October 13, 1897, p. 3.
 The Pall Mall Gazette, October 13, 1897, p. 4.
 The Court Journal, October 16, 1897 p. 1749.
 The Manchester Guardian, October 21, 1897 p. 9.
 * The Athenaeum, October 23, 1897 p. 560.
 The Beacon, Boston Mass., October 23, 1897.
 The Echo, October 23, 1897, p. 1, by F. G. B.
 The Times, Washington D.C., October 24, 1897.
 The Sketch, October 27, 1897, p. 38; reprinted in The Glasgow
 Evening News, October 27, 1897, p. 2.
 * The Bookman, November 1897, p. 44 by A. M.
 * The Literary World, November 5, 1897, p. 360.
 * The Times, November 5, 1897, p. 13; reprinted in The Times Weekly
 Edition, November 12, 1897, p. 730.
 * The Times, May 31, 1898, p. 6.
 The Daily Graphic, November 23, 1897, p. 10.
 The Weekly Sun, December 5, 1897, p. 3 in "With the Poets in 1897"
 by Ariel.
 The Sun, December 8, 1897, p. 2.
 The Morning Post, December 10, 1897, p. 9.
 The Dial, Chicago, January 1, 1898, p. 25.
 The Manchester Guardian, May 31, 1898, p. 3.
 The Weekly Register, June 4, 1898, p. 730.
 * The Illustrated London News, June 18, 1898 p. 896 by C. K. Shorter.
 The Guardian, July 13, 1898, pp. 1089-90.
 The New Age, November 3, 1898, p. 482.
 The Church Times, August 4, 1899, p. 120.
 Womanhood, September, 1899 pp. 326-7 by Elsa D'Esterre-Keeling.
 The Pilot, March 16, 1901, pp. 342-3.
 The Cambridge Review, June 4, 1903, pp. 345-6 by F. S.
 Church Bells, July 17, 1903, p. 683.

SELECTED POEMS

1897.

(From The Academy : October 2, 1897. Under "Reviews : Mr. Meredith as Poet". pp. 253-254.)

Selected Poems : By George Meredith (Constable & Co.)

"Mr. Meredith's poetry is no mere side-issue of the work by which he is better known. Even were these poems the mere luxuries of a great prose writer, they would be interesting, and would be sure of a fit audience; but they are far more. Had Mr. Meredith published no single word of prose; had he left uncreated those living, breathing figures which have grown so familiar, and merely chosen to give to the world this book of verse, a slenderer, but a no less sure, fame would have been his. Not that we, for one moment, recognise in Mr. Meredith one of the great masters of English verse. He is quite incapable of such lines as

"Absent thee from felicity awhile;"

or

"In the bosom of bliss the light of light."

He is still less capable of such a verse as

"For old unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago."

Judged by the highest tests, this poetry will be found wanting; and there seems to us two special deficiencies in it. There is throughout all these poems a lack of that great simplicity which we demand in the highest verse. Passages there are of quite extraordinary beauty, of ripe observation and flowing vigour; but we are from time to time arrested by a metaphor or a thought which is baffling in the extreme. No doubt the fault is largely that of the reader, and Mr. Meredith usually errs through excess of light; at the same time, greater poets, charged with an equal weight of thought, have spoken more directly and cleanly. The pathetic quality seems almost absent - a quality which stands for so much in poetry, and is so characteristic of the English race that the lack of it throughout these poems is the more remarkable. We are not demanding from Mr. Meredith that he should write such lines as

"And thou, too, old man, as we have heard,
Wast once happy,"

or

"the sting
of perishable things in my departing,"

for there are but one or two in all time who can rise to these levels. What we complain of is, that throughout the book the sense of tears is nowhere apparent. Having pointed out what we believe to be certain limitations to Mr. Meredith's poetic gift, we can the more freely enjoy its undoubted richness. We opened the book at "The Nuptials of Attila", and cannot refrain from quoting once more its magnificent opening :

"Flat as to an eagle's eye,
Earth hung under Attila.
Sign for carnage gave he none.
In the peace of his disdain,
Sun and rain, and rain and sun,
Cherished men to wax again,
Crawl, and in their manner die.
On his people stood a frost.
Like the charger cut in stone,
Rearing stiff, the warrior host,
Which had life from him alone,
Craved the trumpet's eager note,
As the bridled earth the Spring.
Rusty was the trumpet's throat.
He let chief and prophet rave;
Venturous earth around him string
Thread's of grass and slender rye,
Wave them, and untrampled wave.
O for the time when God did cry,
Eye and have, my Attila!"

The first two lines of this passage are magnificent, particularly the word "hung", which gives an impression of great distance and space.

Note, too, the look on the face of the "scourge of God", "in the peace of his disdain". Still finer is the image "Like the charger cut in stone", etc., which exactly gives the picture of a huge host ready to charge, but lifeless till their leader gave the word. Surely, however, the additional image, "as the bridled earth the Spring", merely weakens the effect, and the simile itself is altogether more commonplace. Fine, too, is the evidently intentional dissonance, or possibly echo, in -

" When God did cry
Eye and have, my Attila!"

But the whole poem has about it the glee of devastation, the delight of an appointed avenger. Mr. Meredith's metrical effects are often bold, but always justified. Take the fine line -

He/

"He burst out of the bosom of ire."

Wonderful, too, is this picture:

"Name us that,
Huddled in the corner dark,
Humped and grinning like a cat;
Teeth for lips! 'Tis she! She stares,
Glittering through her bristled hairs."

We have said that this poetry is wanting in the sense of tears. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in "The Lark Ascending". The verse here has certainly a wonderful gush and clearness and quickness : it actually does give that sense of a song so joyous that the bird can scarcely get it out. We admit, too, that Mr. Meredith has a perfect right to take the lark in his own way, and hear nothing but the rapture. But if we compare the poem with that of Shelley, we shall at once see that Shelley strikes the deeper, and we believe the truer note. Both poets descend in spirit to the earth after the ravishment of the skylark's voice; but Shelley is touched with a certain sadness of the heart:

"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

Now Mr. Meredith is touched rather by a certain sadness of the mind, here beautifully expressed:

"Was never voice of ours could say
Our inmost in the sweetest way,
Like yonder voice aloft, and link
All hearers in the song they drink.
Our wisdom speaks from failing blood,
Our passion is too full in flood,
We want the key of his wild note,
Of truthful in a tuneful throat;
The song seraphically free
Of taint of personality."

To compare these two poems on the same theme will reveal to us not a little of Mr. Meredith's excellences, and also, as we think, of his defects. Be this as it may, this poem to the lark has the true exuberance and bubble of music. The little poem, "Mother to Babe", opens in exquisite fashion :

"Fleck of sky you are
Dropped through branches dark;"

but hardly gives the impression of complete ease in the writing.

Nothing/

Nothing more delightful in its way than "Love in the Valley" has been written for many years. It is steeped from start to finish in the faintness of dawn, the freshness of youth. Take only the following lovely lines, and especially the two last:

"Thicker crowd the shades as the grave East deepens,
Glowing, and with crimson a long cloud swells.
Maiden still the morn is; and strange she is and
secret;
Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold as
sea-shells."

The "Hymn to Colour" we cannot profess to quite understand, except the ending verses, some lines of which are deep and excellent:

"They do not look through love to look on thee,
Grave heavenliness! Nor know they joy of sight,
Who deem the wave of rapt desire must be
Its wrecking and last issue of delight.
Dead seasons quicken in one petal-spot
of colour unforgot."

We have still reason to complain of a certain coldness in Mr. Meredith in the poem, "Whimper of Sympathy". All sane, strong men hate the sentimentalist, who is the greatest foe of emotion; and there is in these verses a certain fine scorn. But somehow or other we do not feel that these two lines are quite in the poetic key:

"All round we find cold nature slight
The feelings of the totter-kneed."

Here once more we can only raise the old complaint; that finely scornful as these verses are, it is none the less the "rueful sight" of the weak devoured by the strong that should appeal to the poet. Such scorn, though mentally fine, is not "the scorn of scorn" which is the dower of the poet. In "The Appeasement of Demeter" we have a poem really in honour of laughter:

"Laughter! O thou reviver of sick earth!
Good for the spirit, good
For body, thou! to both art wine and bread."

Perhaps, however, the finest poem in the book is that called "The Day of the Daughter of Hades". The author shows in many another poem his delight in life, his love of light and laughter, his Greek apprehension of the beauty of earth; but nowhere, we think, has he given it such full and sweet utterance. We will quote as one example the following passage, containing a wonderful simile:

"He saw through leaves
 The Mother and Daughter meet.
 They stood by the chariot-wheel,
 Embraced, very tall, most like
 Fellow poplars, wind-taken, that reel
 Down their shivering columns and strike
 Head to head, crossing throats : and apart,
 For the feast of the look, they drew,
 Which Darkness no longer could thwart;
 And they broke together anew,
 Exulting to tears, flower and bud.
 But the mate of the Rayless was grave:
 She smiled like Sleep on its flood,
 That washes of all we crave:
 Like the trance of eyes awake
 And the spirit enshrouded, she cast
 The wan underworld on the lake."

This is a passage of quiet beauty; but we cannot forbear quoting another full of fire and rush:

"And the lord of the steeds was in form
 He, the God of implacable brow,
 Darkness : he : he in person : he raged
 Through the wave like a boar of the wilds
 From the hunters and hounds disengaged,
 And a name shouted hoarsely : his child's.
 Horror melted in anguish to hear.
 Lo, the wave hissed apart for the path
 Of the terrible charioteer,
 With the foam and torn features of wrath,
 Hurl'd aloft on each arm in a sheet;
 And the steeds clove it, rushing at land
 Like the teeth of the famished at meat.
 Then he swept out his hand."

We must leave this fine poem with the cry of "Skiageneia!" ringing in our ears.

The "Young Princess" is lightly and often beautifully written, but has not the flash and force of the passage just quoted, or the deep charm of the passage before. Here are four mighty lines from "Lucifer in Starlight".

"Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careened,
 Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows.
 Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars
 With memory of the old revolt from Awe."

Somehow or other the word "pricked" seems rather too small for the effect of zones, but the poem, both in idea - that though Lucifer revolted from Awe, he sank before Law - and in execution, is very strong. "The Star of Sirius" is, we think, nothing like as grand, and such words as "dotlings" and such lines as

"Reducing many lustrous to the lean"

can scarcely be called happy. Of the tributes to Shakespeare there

is no end, and Mr. Meredith makes his contribution. We are much inclined to doubt whether Shakespeare was the calm and benignant creature which it is the custom of all critics and most poets to imagine. The old note is struck by Mr. Meredith, who says:

"Thy greatest knew thee, Mother Earth; unsoured.
He knew thy sons."

Tennyson speak of

"Universal Shakespeare, bland and mild."

Matthew Arnold paints the same picture. One would like to ask whether the reader of "Othello", "Lear", "Timon", "Measure for Measure", and the Sonnets would rise from his book with quite the same feeling of serenity and blandness in Shakespeare's character. We should, at least, like to ask Mr. Meredith whether the word "unsoured" would apply to that wonderful piece of verse beginning

"Tired of all these for restful Death I cry."

In "Winter Heavens" we cannot pass by the following splendid lines:

"The living throb in me, the dead revive.
Yon mantle clothes us : there, past mortal breath,
Life glistens on the river of the death."

"The Old Chartist" is, in its way delightful; and the whole scene with the rat and the mud-bank is natural in the extreme. Especially good is

"I feel superior to a chap whose place
Commands him to be neat and supple."

"Fair Ladies in Revolt" is not, we think, quite so successful, and there are one or two lines which it is almost impossible to scan.

For instance:

"You have erred
In mind only, and the perils that ensue."

We have no space to comment on the many powerful touches in "The Woods of Westermain", with its ghastly ending. We should like to take leave of Mr. Meredith the poet with a last look at "Modern Love". The first of these poems is, we think, the finest. Listen to the ending lines:

"Then/

"Then when the fire doomed blackening, I found
 Her cheek was salt against my kiss, and swift
 Up the sharp scale of sobs her breast did lift:
 Now am I haunted by that taste, that sound!"

Then what a depth of truth there is in the following verse:

"In tragic life, God wot,
 No villain need be! Passions spin the plot;
 We are betrayed by what is false within."

The third poem is less fine; but in the fourth we get such lines as

"Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
 When hot for certainties in this our life!"

But we do not quite like the line - it sounds a little hollow and swollen:

"Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse".

We have, as we have said, found Mr. Meredith the poet somewhat cold, and lamented a certain obscurity in his verse; but that it is the verse of a true, and, at times, a splendid poet, no one with eyes or ears can for a moment doubt."

(From The Literary World : November 5, 1897 page 360.
 An anonymous criticism entitled "George Meredith, Poet".)

"In these days, when we are called upon at very short intervals to consider the rhymes of large numbers of the young Apollos who versify with as much ease as many gentlemen were wont to do when Pope was alive to watch the conduct of literature, it is a big pleasure to fall in with a volume packed full of brilliance of thought and diction, alive with feeling, and, whatever its failings, rich enough in merits to earn the lasting gratitude of all who keep room in their hearts for good poetry. In applying this description to Selected Poems we run no risk of being blamed for exaggeration. Let any competent judge of what is really valuable, who is not given over to the cranks and whims from which so many critics suffer, take up this collection of George Meredith's poems, lean back in his chair and contemplate them with the eyes of the mind. We can quite understand that he will have not a few complaints to advance, for, if he really prove unbiassed and acute, he must of necessity lift up his voice to denounce some of the author's clumsinesses and obscurities;

but/

but if, when he arrives at his verdict, he refuses to utter words charged with amazed and delighted approbation, then we shall begin to wonder whether there really exists any common platform upon which the expert examiners of poetry may take their stand. We may well marvel when we hear of reviewers in whose opinion Mr. Meredith scarcely deserves to be ranked as a poet at all. Let us use a familiar interrogation from a piece by Mr. Bret Harte, and ask whether our civilisation is a failure. Is the Caucasian critic played out? It seems to us incredible that any cultivated reader, who is not naturally incapable of being attracted by the magnets of the Muse, can refrain from enthusiasm in the presence of 'Love in the Valley' and 'Phoebus with Admetus', to mention only two of Mr. Meredith's chief triumphs. There must be something strangely wrong with the craft of criticism when two writers, each of whom is confessedly able, curse and bless the same poem. There was never anything rottener in the State of Denmark. It is something of a scandal that there is not a school for critics, though how to supply proper masters would puzzle even the ingenuity of Mr. Meredith himself.

It would be interesting to know the exact object of the author in presenting us with this bundle of his songs. Is the collection designed to show us the pieces of work by which the singer desires to be judged, or is it put forward as an attempt to widen Mr. Meredith's influence as a poet; to give plain proof that the bugbear of obscurity has been grossly exaggerated? As we are in the dark concerning this matter, it would be absurd now to pen an article in the nature of a final estimate of Mr. Meredith's place and power, lest our second question should turn out to be the one to which an affirmative is due. We may, therefore, pass on to consider other points raised by the appearance of this book. We notice that the first two volumes of poetry which Mr. Meredith published have been almost entirely neglected during the arrangement of the anthology now in front of us. 'Marian' is the sole survivor. When Mr. Meredith began to write verse he was more or less influenced by, at least, two

commanding/

commanding poets. Later on he shook himself free, and set about expressing himself in his own fashion, which, at its best, was admirable. Observe the beautiful diction and movement in these verses following. They are the first and the last of 'Phoebus with Admetus':

"When by Zeus relenting the mandate was revoked,
Sentencing to exile the bright Sun-God,
Mindful were the ploughmen of who the steer had yoked
Who : and what a track showed the upturned sod!
Mindful were the shepherds, as now the noon severe
Bent a burning eyebrow to brown eve-tide,
How the rustic flute drew the silver to the sphere,
Sister of his own, till her rays fell wide.

God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure

You with shelly horns, rams! and, promontory goats,
You whose browsing beards dip in coldest dew!
Bulls, that walk the pastures in kingly-flashing coats!
Laurel, ivy, vine, wreathed for feasts not few!
You that build the shade-roof, and you that court the rays,
You that leap besprinkling the rock stream-rent:
He has been our fellow, the morning of our days!
Us he chose for housemates, and this way went.

God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure."

While we experience plentifully that elation which great work is sure to produce in right readers, we are not uplifted far enough to be altogether out of view of the faults which prevent Mr. Meredith from standing in a line with the greatest poets of the Victorian era. Only occasionally is he fitted with a power to be alluringly musical, and then he makes the most of his fine fortune, but at other times he appears - we judge simply and solely from evidence contained in his poems - to be striving to extort from the Muse what she is determined to withhold. When a melodious mood overcomes him he spends it in this glorious manner:

"When at dawn she sighs, and like an infant to the window
Turns grave eyes craving light, released from dreams,
Beautiful she looks, like a white water-lily
Bursting out of bud in havens of the streams.
When from bed she rises clothed from neck to ankle
In her long nightgown sweet as boughs of May,
Beautiful she looks, like a tall garden lily
Pure from the night, and splendid for the day.

Mother of the dews, dark eye-lashed twilight,
 Low-lidded twilight, o'er the valley's brim,
 Rounding on thy breast sings the dew-delighted skylark,
 Clear as though the dewdrops had their voice in him.
 Hidden where the rose-flush drinks the rayless planet,
 Fountain-full he pours the spraying fountain-showers.
 Let me hear her laughter, I would have her ever
 Cool as dew in twilight, the lark above the flowers.

All the girls are out with their baskets for the primrose;
 Up lanes, woods through, they troop in joyful bands.
 My sweet leads : she knows not why, but now she loiters,
 Eyes bent anemones, and hangs her hands.
 Such a look will tell that the violets are peeping,
 Coming the rose : and unaware a cry
 Springs in her bosom for odours and for colour,
 Covert and the nightingale; she knows not why

Kerchiefed head and chin, she darts between her tulips,
 Streaming like a willow gray in arrowy rain:
 Some bend beaten cheek to gravel, and their angel
 She will be; she lifts them, and on she speeds again.
 Black the driving raincloud breasts the iron gateway:
 She is forth to cheer a neighbour lacking mirth.
 So when sky and grass met rolling dumb for thunder,
 Saw I once a white dove, sole light of earth."

But moods as fertile as this were, like angel's visits, few and far between in the days when Mr. Meredith was eagerly engaged in writing poetry. Oftener he was unblest, as is testified by many rugged passages which jolt a reader with almost unbearable severity; and sometimes, so patent is the labour of managing the chosen form, we cannot but think of ourselves as men watching a duel to the death between Mr. Meredith and the metre. Again, there are moments when we could wish the poet not quite so anxious to quest up and down his vocabulary for odd ways of clothing his meaning. He altogether overlooks the fact that a great poet often gives evidence of his genius by so dealing with the obvious and the commonplace as to extract from them consummate beauty. Granting the amazing fertility and ingenuity of Mr. Meredith's phrases, and his success in returning from every search with, at least, two or three striking novelties. we nevertheless, pine for less audacity, fewer conflicting images, and fewer finger-posts pointing to strain. Sometimes, too, we feel as if Mr. Meredith had invited us to a banquet consisting of courses far too rich to be eaten. We starve in the midst of plenty, afraid of our host, and longing for a crust of dry bread and a cup of water. At the risk of being thought almost as prodigal of similes as the poet himself, we feel obliged to compare Mr. Meredith, when he keeps on

adding/

adding paraphrase to paraphrase, instead of allowing his theme to develop, to a juggler manipulating half-a-dozen golden balls at the same time. The juggler often gives us too much of his clever trick; so does Mr. Meredith. But can these spots spoil the sun? They are so important that we cannot pass them by without comment, but they are not extensive enough to block out from our eyes any but small patches of the golden surface."

(From The Saturday Review : October 9, 1897 pp.393-395.
Under 'Reviews' Mr. Meredith as a Poet : Selected Poems by
George Meredith. Westminster : Constable. 1897.)

"In presenting to us this handsome volume, the publishers offer no prefatory information save that "the selection here made has been (sic) under the supervision of the author". We have been at some pains to trace the sources of this selection, and we think that an analysis of the table of contents may prove interesting to our readers. In the first place, Mr. Meredith has written poetry for at least fifty years; but, with a very few exceptions, what is here selected has been first printed or reapproved since 1823. In the second place absolutely nothing is here which has not appeared already in one of the seven independent volumes of poetry which Mr. Meredith has successively published. In the third, prominent favour has here been shown to whatever illustrates Mr. Meredith's maturer theories of what verse, and especially his own verse, should be. From these statements it may be gathered that the selection represents the poet not quite as posterity and his soberer critics would regard him, but as he pleases to be regarded, and also that no new Meredith is to be discovered here.

It may be well to recapitulate the poetical publications of Mr. Meredith. His volume of "Poems" in 1851 was, we believe, the earliest of all his ventures. It fell still-born from the Press, and quickly became, as the author said long afterwards, "extinct"; it is now of extreme rarity. This book contained the germ of "Love in the Valley", in eleven stanzas, most of which have since been cancelled. It also contained several pastoral songs of great beauty, in particu-

lar one beginning:-

"Love within the lover's breast
Burns like Hesper in the west,
O'er the ashes of the sun,
Till the day and night are done;
Then when dawn drives up her car -
lo! it is the morning-star,"

which Mr. Meredith has never since equalled for pure and limpid felicity. Any dispassionate critic, forming a selection from Mr. Meredith's verse, would certainly take eight or ten examples from this volume of 1851. He would unquestionably include among them "The Moon is alone in the Sky", "The Rape of Aurora", and "The Longest Day". But the peculiar mannerism of the poet was not yet expressed; he was under the influence of Tennyson and the Germans, and the Mr. Meredith of to-day repudiates these mellifluous early lyrics.

Eleven years passed, and Mr. Meredith came forward again with a volume of verse, called "Modern Love, and other Poems"; this is also seldom to be met with, though infinitely more frequent than the grass-green booklet of 1851. By this time a new influence had come into Mr. Meredith's poetic life, and he is revealed as the close and ardent disciple of Browning. It is amusing to note that at the same time another "Meredith", that pseudonymous rhymers afterwards to be known so widely as Robert, Earl Lytton, was in precisely the same relation to the author of "Men and Women". Odd as it now sounds, the two closest and most consistent imitators or adapters of the peculiarities of Browning in 1860 were "Owen Meredith" and Mr. George Meredith. Continuing our examination of the volume before us, we may point out that the melodious song called 'Marian' is the sole example of early lyric work, hitherto unrestored, which the poet gives us here from the volume of 1862. In 1892, under pressure from his friends, he reprinted "Modern Love", from which he here spares four fragments. Everybody, moreover, will be glad to receive in "Juggling Jerry" and "The Old Chartist" examples of his original series of Browningsque "Roadside Philosophers". We have a weakness for "The Patriot Engineer" but Mr. Meredith does not seem to share it. Indeed, he shows himself
extremely/

extremely chary about all his old work in verse.

Finally, in 1883, there appeared "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth"; in 1887 "Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life"; in 1892 the reprint of "Modern Love", eked out by an eccentric enigma, called "The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady"; and, in the same year, "The Empty Purse". These five successive books, in a uniform dress of dark blue-green, have been Mr. Meredith's deliberate gift in verse to the latest generation. It is, as we have said, almost exclusively from these that the present selection is made; and we may close the results of our analysis by saying that we have found seventeen of its pieces to come from the volume of 1883, five from that of 1887, twelve from that of 1888, and five from "The Empty Purse" of 1892. Of the non-lyrical poems which were appended to "Modern Love" in 1892, we cannot discover that the author has availed himself of a single specimen. If this bibliographical preamble seems indifferent to the general reader, it will not fail, we think, to interest that class of enthusiastic students to whom Mr. Meredith appeals, largely indeed in his prose, but exclusively in his verse.

It is exceedingly difficult to express the pleasure which is undoubtedly given to us by the poetry of Mr. Meredith, without hedging our praise round with so many restrictions as to seem to destroy all its graciousness. Let us have the courage to say our worst at the outset, that we may reverse the process. It seems to us, then, that the poetry of Mr. Meredith depends for its effect almost wholly on elements that are not poetical. It carries with it none of that enchanting inevitability, that copious flow of music which to hold in would cause intolerable pain, which are the essence of successful speech in verse. Unless the poet is like the bird - or the volcano - unless we have, in listening to him, the impression that an irrepressible instinct or centrifugal force is obliging him to sing, our delight in his song is extremely reduced. In all Mr. Meredith's poems this quality of impulsiveness is found but once, in 'Love in the Valley', which is undated, yet is certainly a very early production; some parts of it, as we have seen, were printed so long ago as 1851.

With this exception, we know not a single copy of verses re-

cognised/

cognized by Mr. Meredith in which there is not a sense of effort, of ceaseless strain. Sometimes, for a couplet or so, the real poetic accent seems to be gained, as in the close of "Wind on the Lyre":

"The breast of us a sounded shell,
The blood of us a lighted dew,"

and in the opening stanza of "Young Reynard". But Mr. Meredith can no more keep up this felicity of lyrical utterance than could Emerson, with whom as a poet he has curious affinities. In each case we have a great prose writer, full of ideas, rich in illustration, exquisitely sensitive to the value of words, and almost pathetically anxious to succeed in the writing of poetry. Given such qualities, with such strength of will to guide them, and failure cannot be. The critic who should say that Mr. Meredith has failed as a poet would not be worthy of attention. But if he has succeeded, it is with that lower species of success which depends upon labour of the file and strenuous urging of the stubborn fancy. With agonies scarcely to be uttered, Mr. Meredith has made himself a poet, and the result is a beautiful artifice, exquisite prose pressed into metre against its will, a miraculous product of ingenuity and pertinacity. This, too, has its place in literature, but not with Burns or Shelley.

Perhaps the most completely successful of Mr. Meredith's compositions in verse is his "Phoebus with Admetus". Let the reader study this excellent poem with care, and something of the poet's method will be revealed to him. Here the instinct for avoiding the obvious in thought and diction is so far held within bounds that it does not disturb us by its extravagance. The story is one of a grandeur so elemental, and is so familiar to us in its outlines, that our attention is left free for the poet's embroideries of fancy. The incidents of pastoral life and landscape are introduced with skill and without violence. There is even a measure of advance in the subject (the absence of this is one of Mr. Meredith's main weaknesses), and a final stanza of really extraordinary beauty sums up the whole in a very fine key of passion. But now let us turn to "The Song of Theodolinda", with which we must suppose the author to be satisfied, since he has allowed it a place in this selection. This appears to us to be almost as bad a specimen of what Mr. Meredith can do as

"Phoebus/

"Phoebus with Admetus" is good. In that case every educated person must know the story; in this one the story is unknown to all but specialists. But Mr. Meredith does not, for that reason, allow his poem to explain itself; on the contrary, he contrives, in twenty-one stanzas, to preserve its obscurity with almost incredible success. One would have thought it impossible to remain so unintelligible in such a flow of varied language. The reader, then, bewildered by these initial difficulties as to who Queen Theodolinda was, and what she did, and why she did it, and what came of it all, is defenceless against the eccentricities of the verbiage and the absolute stagnation of the theme, which, so far as can be discovered, never advances beyond the sudden burst of the opening stanza.

We have spoken of Mr. Meredith's lack of evolution, of his inability to proceed. His work always gives the reader a curious sense that he is more keenly conscious than any reader can be of the defects of his genius, and that he expends amazing trouble in attempting to conceal them. He knows, we do not question, that he has a difficulty in developing a theme in verse, and he exercises himself to hide this inability by redoubling the efforts of his fancy. His conceits, on these occasions, surpass in number and ingenuity those of Donne or Marini. We may take as an instance the poem called "Hard Weather". Here in a few lines, the wind is a barrier, then a wolf, then a falcon; it gallops, it is a scythe, and then a rod, and then the sea; it drums, it pipes, it is a fierce angel, it is a winnower, it is a fountain-jet, it is a dagger. Each of these images has an imaginative propriety, and we are amused by each; but when we go further, and ask ourselves what the result of the whole poem is, we find that Mr. Meredith has simply said "What a rough day it is! Let me see in how many startling ways I can express its roughness."

Of greater value are such poems as "Woods of Westermain" and "Hymn to Colour", where the author has possessed himself of themes which are curiously and elaborately imaginative, and has been able to expand them in such a way as, without any excess of violent illustration, to retain our attention. Yet, even here, it is exasperating to find

Mr. Meredith exhibiting so little of the tact of a true poet. The genuine beauty of "Woods of Westermain", for instance, is greatly diminished and obscured by what would seem incompatible errors - it is too much enlarged and yet congested, it gives us too little substance and yet too fluid a verbiage. But we are not keeping our promise; we are dwelling on the drawbacks rather than the merits of Mr. Meredith's verses. If so, it is because they are in many qualities so excellent, are filled with so many evidences of admirable observation and glowing fancy, and so elevated in temper and so brilliant with intellectual vitality, that we cannot forgive them for not being better still, for not - to be curt - being really in the true sense poetry at all."

(From The Athenaeum No. 3652, October 23, 1897.
'Our Library Table' p. 560.)

"Great interest, of course, attaches to the Selected Poems by George Meredith, published by Messrs. A. Constable & Co. We are told in a note that "the selection here made has been under the supervision of the author", and there is always something attractive and significant in the choice made by a poet from the bulk of his poems. That choice, to be sure, is not always satisfactory either to the poet's admirers or to the general reader. It is not quite satisfactory in the present case. One wonders equally at inclusions and exclusions, and at the latter especially. If, for example, Mr. Meredith approves of the reproduction of "The Old Chartist" and "Juggling Jerry", why does he sanction the omission of "The Beggar's Soliloquy"? If he did not disdain the clear simplicity of "Marian", why should he discountenance such pieces as "Love within the lover's breast", "Violets" and so forth? He ignores altogether the 'Poems' of 1851, and draws most largely upon the verse-volumes issued by him in 1883 and 1888. The result is the bringing together of much brilliant and delightful work, such as 'Love in the Valley', 'The Lark Ascending', 'The Thrush in February', and the like - work which must always give pleasure to the cultivated sense. But that these 'Selected Poems' will do much

to extend the popularity of Mr. Meredith as a poet is, perhaps, doubtful : they comprise too few concessions to the popular taste."

(From The Bookman. November 1897 page 44. Under "New Books" signed A.M.)

'Mr. Meredith's Poetry.'*

"There is no reason to quarrel with Mr. Meredith's selection from his poetry. We may miss a few favourite pieces, but there is hardly a characteristic note it does not sound. His compass in poetry is less than in prose, but there are depths that have never been made manifest save in his verse. In prose he has touched the tragic sometimes, but rather shyly; his desires and interests are all far removed from the wild and the frenzied. The morbid is to him forbidding and accursed; and though there is a good deal of wholesome cant spoken of the sanity of the great reflectors of the human kind, the tragedians have always looked over the borders of the sane and dwelt there for a space. Only in his poetry, and that seldom, does he ever grapple with the abnormal, the dark and terrible; and if "The Nuptials of Attila" be a fine experiment in this, "The Song of Theodolinda" is a great and singular achievement. This passionate outburst of religious frenzy is the one real glimpse of the terrible he shares with us.

"Queen Theodolinda has built
In the earth a furnace-bed;
There the Traitor Nail that spilt
Blood of the anointed Head,
Red of heat, revolves in shame:
White of heat, awakes to flame.
Beat, beat! white of heat,
Red of heat, beat, beat!
.....
Brand me, bite me, bitter thing!
Thus he felt, and thus I am
One with him in suffering.
.....
Now am I, who bear that stamp
Scorched in me, the living sign
Sole on earth - the lighted lamp
Of the dreadful day divine.
.....
Strike it as the ages crush
Towers! for while a shape is seen
I am rivalled. Quench its blush,
Devil! But it crowns me Queen,
Red of heat, as none before,
White of heat, the circlet wore."

* "Selected Poems" by George Meredith. 6s. net (A. Constable & Co,)

It is of far other things he elsewhere sings, though of the strife behind the kindly veil of Nature he tells in "The Woods of Westminster". The common refreshment of earth and sky is his best inspiration. He is above all the poet of the woods -

"No Paradise is lost for them
Who foot by branching root and stem,
And lightly with the woodland share
The change of night and day."

He loves the cheery, the grateful, the young, the unconscious things; for music, the lark's song -

"The song seraphically free
From taint of personality."

He is the sincerest observer; not Tennyson was more so. But his is too often the slow, cumulative effect of the naturalist rather than the vision-flash of the artist. There is excellent stuff, for instance, in such a poem as "The South-Wester", but it is a laborious pleasure you get from it. Yet after enduring much, out of respect to a man who never writes a line of sounding rubbish, you are rewarded by bursts of genuine lyric beauty, lines that paint once and for ever the Nature - sensitive -

"The breast of us a sounded shell,
The blood of us a lighted dew";

unforgettable pictures, like that of the sunset-star -

"Remote, not alien; still, not cold;
Unraying yet, more pearl than star;
She seems awhile the vale to hold
In trance, and homelier makes the far;"

happy verses, like the song to water, "Water, first of singers", in "Phoebus with Admetus"; like those that sing the sweetest of all country girls, the morning-light maiden of "Love in the Valley" -

"Deals she an unkindness, 'tis but her rapid measure,
Even as in a dance; and her smile can heal no less;
Like the swinging May-cloud that pelts the flowers with hail-stones
Off a sunny border, she was made to bruise and bless."

But if his verse have that much desired thing, a "message", it is not a call merely to the woodland, but a warning to the sensitive idealist, that wisdom does not grow rich in green fields alone, or in the press of men alone -

"It hangs for those who hither, thither fare,
Close interthreading nature with our kind."

There/

There never was a less languorous, a robuster poet. The common, healthy man would heartily approve him if he would but make his speech a little plainer - for though he mostly drops his mannerisms in verse, his syntax is often maddening. He hates the "totter-kneed", the whiners, "who feed upon a breast unthanked." His belief in brains, "Sky of the senses!" in the delight of struggle, in manly, clear-eyed acquiescence with the trend of things, is as visible in his verse as in his prose. He has not, as some prose writers have done, used verse for the expression of his feeblar sicklier hours. Sanity amidst beauty, courage amid the ruin of it, is for him earth's secret.

"We fall, or view our treasures fall,
Unclouded, as beholds her flowers
Earth, from a night of frosty wreck,
Enrobed, in morning's mounted fire,
When lowly, with a broken neck,
The crocus lays her cheek to mire."

A.M."

(From The Times : Tuesday, May 31, 1898 page 6
under 'Recent Verse'.)

"A very neat and comely edition of Mr. Meredith's Selected Poems, reviewed in our columns some six months ago, is issued by Messrs. Constable. The volume is small enough for the pocket, but the type is as clear as could be wished, and, though the paper is stout, the little book is light and easy to hold in the hand. It provides a thoroughly artistic as well as convenient setting for the fine flower of Mr. Meredith's poetic genius. Messrs. Constable have also issued during the last few days the 29th and 30th volumes of their handsome edition of Mr. Meredith's complete works. Beginning with "Modern Love", published in 1862, these volumes include also "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth"(1883), "Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life"(1887), "A Reading of Earth"(1888), and some detached sonnets and epigrams. There will presumably be another volume to contain the rest of the poems, including no doubt, the series on the French Revolution which have been lately printed in Cosmopolis. The selection mentioned above is very good and represents Mr. Meredith's genius in most of its aspects, but the student of poetry will hardly be content with anything

less than the complete poems. A one-volume edition of these would be very welcome to all admirers of their author's genius."

(From The Times : Friday, November 5, 1897 page 13.
'Recent Verse')

"Some modern poetry ought never to have been written; much more should have been kept for the author and his family and not published; a good deal has enough distinction to deserve printing; and to a very little we do not grudge the final honour of appearing in the form of selections. We have examples of all four classes before us at the moment

Only one of the volumes before us belongs to the fourth and best class; it is Selected Poems, by George Meredith (A. Constable). Neither in this age nor in any other is Meredith's poetry likely to be popular, even with the limited popularity which came to Browning with the publication of "The Ring and the Book"; but there are a few who scorn to ascend Parnassus by the beaten road, and care nothing for the view from its peaks unless they have got there over crags and chasms. These are the true Meredithians, and to them the "Hymn to Colour", "The Nuptials of Attila", and "Modern Love" would be nothing if it were not for their difficulty. It is a question of taste, but we confess that for us the way to pleasure lies not through so much pain. Why is not the whole of "Melampus" as simple as the first stanza? Why, at intervals throughout that marvellous "Night of Frost in May" - a succession of pictures almost unmatched in our language for concentrated vision - do we find couplets like this, requiring the utmost strain of the intelligence to take their meaning?

"There chimed a bubbled underbrew
With witch-wild spray of vocal dew."

But it would be unfair to give this knotty fragment as the sole specimen of the wood with which this rich cabinet is inlaid. Let us add one short and perfectly intelligible poem, as beautiful, true, and rare as a picture of Mr. Watts at his best. It is called "A Ballad of Past Meridian":)

Last/

I.

Last night returning from my twilight walk
 I met the grey mist Death, whose eyeless brow
 Was bent on me, and from his hand of chalk
 He reached me flowers as from a withered bough:
 O Death, what bitter nosegays givest thou!

II.

Death said, I gather, and pursued his way.
 Another stood by me, a shape in stone,
 Sword-hacked and iron-stained, with breasts of clay,
 And metal veins that sometimes fiery shone:
 O Life, how naked and how hard when known!

III.

Life said, As thou hast carved me, such am I.
 Then memory, like the nightjar on the pine,
 And sightless hope, a woodlark in night sky,
 Joined notes of Death and Life till night's decline.
 Of Death, of Life, those inwound notes are mine."

(From The Illustrated London News : June 18, 1898,
 p.896 : Under Literature : Notes on New Books : C.K.S.)

"Mr. Meredith himself has said that "a gathering of all plums is not digestible". Certainly the poems collected, from various sources, to the joy of true Meredithians, in this very dainty little volume and selected "under the supervision of the author" are not all "plums". Many of them require to be studied and restudied before their full meaning can be grasped by those whom this selection makes for the first time acquainted with Mr. Meredith's many-toned, many-coloured verse. Not a few of them, however, belong to the more easily appreciable of what one of the greatest admirers of his poetry has playfully called "Meredithyrambics". Among them are such comparatively familiar favourites as "The Lark Ascending", "The Thrush in February", "The Woods of Westermain", and "Love in the Valley". The last named of these is particularly interesting, as being the only piece in the volume which has been transferred from Mr. Meredith's earliest published work - he was a poet before he was known as a prose-writer - the now very rare "Poems by George Meredith", issued in 1851, when he was twenty-three. Thus early in his career the "Love in the Valley" of 1851 was hailed by the Edinburgh Review as "a little poem of singular sweetness, truth, and originality". Some, but not all, of the few stanzas of which, in its first form it, consisted, are reproduced in what has since become a richly elaborated poem of considerable length.

ODES
IN CONTRIBUTION
TO THE SONG
OF FRENCH
HISTORY
BY
GEORGE MEREDITH.

1898.

Reviews:

- * The Academy, March 12, 1898, p.293, "Mr. Meredith's Ode", by Francis Thompson.
- * , April 9, 1898, p.397; November 19, 1898, p. 3.
- The Westminster Gazette, April 14, 1898, p. 3.
- The Critic, April 16, 1898, p. 20.
- The Scotsman, October 24, 1898, p. 3.
- The Glasgow Herald, October 27, 1898, p. 10.
- News of the Week, October 29, 1898, p. 7.
- * The Spectator, October 29, 1898, p. 609.
- The Chicago Evening Post, November 5, 1898 by Bliss Carman.
- The Manchester Guardian, November 5, 1898, p. 5.
- The New York Tribune, Illustrated Supplement, November 6, 1898, p.713.
- The Pall Mall Gazette, November 10, 1898, p. 4.
- The Daily Chronicle, November 11, 1898, p. 3.
- * The Saturday Review, November 12, 1898, pp. 644-5.
- * The Times, November 12, 1898, p. 10.
- * Literature, November 26, 1898, pp. 485-6.
- September 30, 1899, pp. 322-3, "The Love of France", by E.W.
- * The Bookman, December 1898, pp. 78-9, by A. M.
- The Glasgow Evening News, December 1, 1898, p. 2.
- The Weekly Sun, December 4, 1898, Literary Supplement, p. 1, in "The Poetry of the Year".
- Le Journal des Debats, December 7, 1898, p. 1.
- La Volonte, December 7, 1898.
- La Haute Loire, December 9, 1898.
- The Outlook, December 10, 1898, p. 605.
- * The Athenaeum, December 24, 1898, p. 285.
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ODES
IN CONTRIBUTION
TO THE SONG OF
FRENCH HISTORY.

1898.

(from The Bookman, Dec. 1898 pp. 78-9 by A. M.:
 J. A. Hammerton in his study "George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism" at first attributed this review to Alice Meynell, but this was proved incorrect; he later stated that it probably came from the pen of Miss Annie Macdonell. The reviewer's assertion that "Mr. Meredith and all his ways are now accepted", is an interesting comment on the growth of Meredith's fame.)

" This is the hour of hours for a lover of France to stand out and declare the debt of the nations for her light and leading along many high paths through the ages. Statesmen ignore such acts of courtesy, but their effects last nevertheless, and must sweeten the intercourse between two peoples so diverse, so dependent on each other's goodwill. Mr. Meredith's Odes are not mild eulogies of the talents and the prowess of a great neighbour; they are not flatteries designed to soothe. France has called them forth rather by her tragic struggles, her tragic experimentalism, her tragic failures, than by the moments when she has been serene and supreme. They are Odes on the Revolution, on Napoleon, on the terrible year of '70, on Alsace-Lorraine, and they contain remonstrance and warning as well as eulogy. There is something in France that defies a real, understanding lover to be sentimental over her. Her intelligence, her irritant vitality, compel her into combats, and equally flout patronage and cajolery. Mr. Meredith's fearless friendship is of the virile, the tolerable kind. But will she ever know more than the fact of the existence of this candid, this ardent friend? Is the Frenchman born who will make plain these rugged metres to his countrymen? Will M. Davray do it? Then we have need of that wonderful expositor on this side of the Channel, too.

It is, indeed, a strange irony of fate that the lucid genius of France should be sung in such desperately tortured and turgid strain.

True/

True, one hears very little of the difficulty of the poems from the critics, but that is because Mr. Meredith and all his ways are now accepted. Every cultured person is expected to understand him as a matter of course. But I will make bold to say it is a very hard student of the Odes who has come to an approximate comprehension of certain passages, and I am not convinced that the difficulty arises from anything worthier than the common source of such difficulties - a defective expression and a carelessness of beauty. The new affectation of understanding all is hardly less absurd than the old one of failing to understand anything. So we must in honesty speak not of the whole, but of parts.

There is one ode to which this criticism does not apply, that to France in 1870. It has been already published. Perhaps some will recall it for its memorable line -

"By their great memories the Gods are known"

It is a fine poem finely fashioned. No son of her womb has sung a higher song to her, nor one to make her wince more wholesomely in certain moments.

"She snatched at heaven's flame of old
And kindled nations : she was weak:
Frail sister of her heroic prototype,
The Man; for sacrifice unripe,
She too must fill a Vulture's beak,
Deride the vanquished, and acclaim
The conqueror, who stains her fame;
Still the Gods love her, for that of high aim
Is this good France, the bleeding thing they stripe."

The others, as I have said, have their veiled portions, and their painfully rugged, unmelodious portions; some of the latter sadly disturbing to the fine thought and harmony of the context, as, for example, the grotesque dissonance -

"Yesterday's clarion cock scudded hen of the invalid comb;
They, the triumphant tonant towering upper, were under."

But they are all marvels of brilliant energy, genuine kindling fires lighting the sky, while heroic shapes are made to play their great and terrible parts beneath. Here is the picture of revolutionary France:

"Athirst to kiss, athirst to slay, she stood,
A radiance fringed with grim affright;
For them that hungered, she was nourishing food,
For those who sparkled, Night."

The whole making of the Grand Army is told in a few vivacious lines. Not Victor Hugo has painted Bonaparte, brigand and awesome genius, more monumentally, nor has the enthusiasm of France for his guiding been so rapturously set forth:

"Scarce felt she that she bled when battle scored
On riddled flags the further conjured line;
From off the meteor gleam of his waved sword
Reflected bright in permanence : she bled
As the Bacchante spills her challenging wine
With whirl o' the cup before the kiss to lip;
And bade drudge History in his footprints tread,
For price of sword-strokes o'er slow penmanship:
Each step of his a volume: his sharp word
The shower of steel and lead
Of pastoral sunshine."

The judgment on France for her abandonment of herself to his force is solemnly chanted; and yet his shade is never belittled. We are bidden look at the "Grey Observer" watching grimly the alien triumph -

"The Prussia despised, the harried, the trodden, was here;
His pupil, the scholar in strife."

He sings, too, a better guardian of the fair land. Jeanne has had smoother lyrics made in her honour, but she is of the woodlands and the hills, and this rough wildflower garland cast on her shrine smells sweet:

"Earth's gem,
Earth's chosen, Earth's throb on divine:
In the ranks of the starred she is one,
.....
Breath of the mountain, beam of the sun
Through mist, out of swamp-fires' lures release,
Youth on the forehead, the rough right way
Seen to be footed : for them the heart's peace,
By the mind's war won for a permanent miracle day."

A. M."

(from The Academy, March 12, 1898, page 293 by Francis Thompson, Thompson was himself a poet, and an able literary critic. Though he admits the poem's shortcomings, 'The Revolution' evidently stirred him to enthusiastic admiration of its force and splendour.)

"I have read Mr. Meredith's Ode in the current Cosmopolis with an amazement passing words. Amazement for its power, amazement for its sins, its flagrancies, its defiant pitching to the devil of all law recognised even by the boldest, the most scornful of merely conventional tradition; amazement - for it fulfils its title, it is

itself/

itself an anarchy, a turbulence, tumultuously eruptive as the Revolution in its first unchaining. To say it is not a perfect poem would be mild. It challenges all order; it has every fault within a poet's compass, except the tame faults, except lack of inspiration. On the plenitude, the undeniable plenitude, of its aggressive force, it seems to stake everything. No one can complain that Mr. Meredith fears his fate too much. I am in tune with most audacity, but Mr. Meredith leaves me gasping.

You must read the poem once, as you play a difficult fantasia once, merely to see how it goes; a second time, to begin to read it; a third time, to begin to redise it. All the arduous power and all the more repellent vices of Mr. Meredith's poetic style are here at grips, exalted by mutual antiposition and counteraction. Never has he been more intermittently careless of grammatical construction, obscuring what is already inherently difficult. He storms onward like his own France, crashing and contorting in his path the astonishing sentences, now volcanic and irresistibly thundering, now twisted and writhing or furiously splintered. The metre is likewise; lines blocked, immobile, inflexible, with needless rubble of words, or whirring all ways like snapped and disintegrated machinery; yet at times forcing their way to rightness through sheer inward heat, and leaping like a geyser-spout - magnificently impressive.

For the Ode is wonderful, though an unlawful wonder. The first nine stanzas, with all their perverse difficulties and disfeatures, are full of astonishing imagery, passages like the loosing of pent fires. The poem has a devil in it. By no other word can we describe the magnetic intensity of its repellentness and arrestingness. Those who overcome their first recoil must end in submission - if protesting submission - to its potency. No youth could rival the nether furnaces of this production of age, no young imagination conceive these images which outpour by troops and battalia. Mr. Meredith's own language can alone figure the poem:

"Ravishing/

"Ravishing as red wine in woman's form,
 A splendid Maenad, she of the delirious laugh,
 Her body twisted flames with the smoke-cap crowned,
 who sang, who sang
 Intoxication to her swarm,
 Revolved them, hair, voice, feet, in her carmagnole."

That splendid outburst is all for which I have room. If this Ode be not a success (as I wish I might persuade myself it is), more power has gone to such a failure than would make a score of reputations. And assuredly much, very much, it were blind to call anything but success.

FRANCIS THOMPSON."

(from The Academy, April 9, 1898 page 397 in section headed 'Notes and News'.)

"Cannon his name,
 Cannon his voice, he came."

"These are the first two of the eight hundred odd lines of Mr. Heredith's contribution of Napoleonic verse to Cosmopolis. Some might say, borrowing from the Douglas Jerrold mint, that these are the only understandable lines, but that would be unjust, as there are many illuminative passages in the whirl of imagery and gymnastic thought that go to the making of this feat in verse. We can place our hand upon our heart and say we have read it through from "Cannon his name" to "Hull down, with mast against the Western hues", and, if we say that it is our intention never to renew the escalade, it is because this is not the kind of poetry we read for pleasure. At the same time, we offer our humble tribute of admiration to the splendid vigour of a mind that could conceive and bring forth such a giant exercise in the art of ode-making.

Our first stumble occurred on the second page:

"That Soliform made featureless beside
 His brilliancy who neighbored : vapour they;
 Vapour what postured statutes barred his tread."

Set against that the vivid imagery of these two lines:

"Kind to her ear as quiring Cherubim,
 And trampling earth like scornful mastodons."

And/

And these:

"Like foam-heads of a loosened freshet bursting banks,
By mount and fort they thread to swamp the sluggish plains."

In the passage that follows it was "the hydrocephalic aerolite" that pleaded for quotation:

"Now had the Seaman's volvent sprite,
Lean from the chase that barked his contraband.
A beggared applicant at every port,
To strew the profitless deeps and rot beneath,
Slung northward, for a hunted beast's retort
On sovereign power; there his final stand,
Among the perjured Scythian's shaggy horde,
The hydrocephalic aerolite
Had taken; flashing thence repellent teeth,
Though Europe's Master Europe's rebel banned
To be earth's outcast, ocean's lord and sport."

Here finally, is a characteristic Meredithian passage:

"He would not fall, while falling; would not be taught,
While learning; would not relax his grasp on aught
He held in hand, while losing it; pressed advance,
Pricked for her lees the veins of wasted France;
Who, had he stayed to husband her, had spun
The strength he taxed unripened for his throw,
In repercussent casts calamitous,
On fields where palseying Pyrrhic laurels grow,
The luminous the ruinous.
An incalcescent scorpion,
And fierier for the mounded cirque
That narrowed at him thick and murk,
This gambler with his genius
Flung lives in angry volleys, bloody lightnings, flung
His fortunes to the hosts he stung,
With victories clipped his eagle's wings."

Yet one more quotation : one line in the Ode which aptly describes the effect upon the ordinary reader after grappling with the 800 lines:

"The innumerable whelmed him, and he fell."

Apropos of a second edition of the Ode, we notice, by the way, that a flippanit critic commenting upon the phrase "incalcescent scorpion" suggests that some editor of the future, more intent upon fact than imagination, will probably alter it to "incandescent Corsican".

It was almost a relief to come back to earth and Mr. Andrew Lang on p. 69 of the same issue of Cosmopolis - to such a morsel of natural happy-go-lucky criticism as this: "One would be glad to lie on a sofa, like Gray, and read dozens of novels by Miss Coleridge, if they were all as good as The King with Two Faces". Half way

down/

down the same page we found something which, as Archdeacon Farrar said of Mr. Hall Caine's Christian, "made us think". There Mr. Lang is allowed by the editor and the printer's reader of Cosmopolis to speak of The Master of Balantyne. If such a misprint is possible in "Notes on New Books", then misprints are also possible in Mr. Meredith's "Napoleon". Can it be that -? We await a second edition of the Ode with anxiety."

(from The Academy, November 19, 1898. This article is an interesting synopsis of the contemporary criticisms of the Odes. It is under the Section 'Book Reviews Reviewed'.)

"Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History."

"Not for the first time, the critics are divided between respect for Mr. Meredith's genius and the agony of interpreting what he writes. "We are proud of him", says the Saturday Review, but Mr. Meredith's horror of the banal has led him to a more and more violent search for extraordinary words, images, and turns of fancy. Triviality is so hateful to him that he has become insensible to the fact that in order to address his fellows at all certain familiar locutions must be permitted. Mr. Meredith defies intelligibility by clothing not only rare and splendid conceptions with magnificent verbiage, but by lavishing it everywhere, so that his very scavenger-boys run about in cloth-of-gold... When he has been drawn into the use of a particularly extravagant or inapt image, he tries to enforce our admiration by repeating it again and again. The amazing simile of the "cherubim" and the "mastadons" is one example of this, and the unfortunate but reiterated phrase about "Earth's fluttering little lyre" another."

"On the whole", says this critic, "the most delightful passage in the volume, and that which torments us least with over-emphasis or a restless search after oddity, after the unusual, is the temperate and generous praise of France in the tenth strophe of "Alsace-Lorraine". Had all, or much, been like this, we should not have had to record, with genuine grief, our conviction that this ambitious cycle of Odes had better have been left unattempted".

The Daily Chronicle's critic says that Mr. Meredith's love for France is a passion, and in these Odes it finds "full and splendid expression". Mr. Meredith's obscurity is thus mentioned:

'He is bewilderingly free from conventions of diction; each phrase seems forced or coined for the occasion. Rarely may our minds slip along, even for a short space, an accustomed groove. His extraordinary fertility in

suggestion/

suggestion and allusion is baffling to all but the most alert intelligence. As he has never compromised with his readers, he seems now to have become even more expert in concentration, in a kind of mental shorthand, which satisfies himself. So, with the necessary labour, we may get closer to the individuality of a writer whose language is his own than to those who are hedged round with accustomed formulas.

The Times critic's review of these Odes is little more than a cry of despair. He compares them unfavourably, in the matter of lucidity, with Carlyle's French Revolution:

.....After all, Carlyle was intelligible to the fairly trained reader, who consented to give his whole mind to interpreting the book. The present reviewer has honestly done his best to understand three of Mr. Meredith's Odes, and must admit that he has failed; nor does he believe that ninety-nine out of a hundred unprejudiced readers fairly accustomed to English verse will do better. Here is a sample from "Alsace-Lorraine" - a fair sample, not one whit more obscure than all the rest of the twenty-five pages:

"He haled to heel, in a spasm of will,
From sleep or debate, a mannikin squire
With head of a merlin hawk and quill
Acrow on an ear. At him rained fire
From a blast of eyeballs hotter than speech,
To say what a deadly poison stuffed
The France here laid in her bloody ditch,
Through the Legend passing human puffed."

(from The Spectator : October 29, 1898 page 609 : under section headed 'Current Literature'.)

"The Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History, by George Meredith (Archibald Constable), which have been appearing in Cosmopolis, are now published in book form. One of the poems - "France" is a republication. It was written in the December of 1870, printed in the Fortnightly Review, and published in the volume, "Ballads and Poems". This earlier ode we are inclined to think, as a whole, the finest in the book. Thirty years ago Mr. Meredith desired to prophesy rather than to speak with tongues, and true Meredithians, if they are not already familiar with the poem, will be quite disappointed by its simplicity. In a fine passage "France", after her defeat, is described as in agony calling upon the gods:-

But/

"But she, inveterate of brain, discerns
 That pity has as little place as Joy
 Among their roll of gifts; for Strength she yearns,
 For Strength, her idol once, too long her toy.
 Lo, Strength is of the plain root-Virtues born:
 Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,
 Train by endurance, by devotion shape.
 Strength is not won by miracle or rape.
 It is the offspring of the modest years."

And, again, France, is exhorted to learn of her dead and bleeding sons "the lesson of the flesh":-

"The lesson writ in red since first Time ran
 A hunter hunting down the beast in man:
 That till the chasing out of its last vice,
 The flesh was fashioned but for sacrifice."

The newer odes contain many fine lines, but they are so obscure that none but the most devoted students can hope to understand them in their entirety. Their titles are a great help to finding out their general drift, but even when this is accomplished there remain many lines in each poem which have, so far as we can judge, no meaning at all. To take an instance at random, what is a "nerveless well amongst stagnant pools of the dry"? A stagnant pool of the dry might be a dust heap, but that does not help us to the well. Is it not hard to have to accept such a sentence as this from a man who can write the following lines about Napoleon? -

"Who heard of him heard shaken hills
 An earth at quake, to quiet stamped;
 Who looked on him beheld the will of wills,
 The driver of wild flocks where lions ramped."

Could anything be finer? But if we (the public) are worthy of the one, ought we to be affronted by the other? Thirty years ago Mr. Meredith could write a fine historical ode. Now he can write finer lines than anything in that ode, but his respect for his readers has not increased with his years, and he throws them snatches of splendid song intermingled, to use his own words, with the "last weak echoes off (sic) a giant's bawl."

(from The Times, Saturday, November 12, 1898 page 10.
 Under Books of the Week : Recent Verse. Apart from 'France, 1870' this reviewer found the Odes unintelligible.)

"Even the most devoted of Meredithians may well be somewhat dismayed by the last book of the master. Odes in Contribution to the

Song of French History, by George Meredith (Constable), "Inscribed to the Right Hon. John Morley, M. P.," consists of four poems headed respectively "The Revolution", "Napoleon", "France, December, 1870", and "Alsace-Lorraine", of which one, the third, was written 28 years ago, and has been already twice printed, while the others are new. Carlyle long ago made a poetic picture of the Revolution, and half its effectiveness depended upon the lurid impressionism of the writer's art; but, after all, Carlyle was intelligible to the fairly trained reader who consented to give his whole mind to interpreting the book. The present reviewer has honestly done his best to understand three of Mr. Meredith's Odes, and must admit that he has failed; nor does he believe that 99 out of 100 unprejudiced readers fairly accustomed to English verse will do better. Here is a sample from Alsace-Lorraine" - a fair sample, not one whit more obscure than all the rest of the 25 pages.

"He haled to heel, in a spasm of will,
From sleep or debate, a mannikin squire
With head of a merlin hawk and quill
Acrow on an ear. At him rained fire
From a blast of eyeballs hotter than speech,
To say what a deadly poison stuffed
The France here laid in her bloody ditch,
Through the Legend passing human puffed.

It is really painful to contrast with this the Ode called "France", written in December, 1870, and here reprinted, though it has long been one of the best known of Mr. Meredith's poems. No wonder, for it is magnificent in conception, in ordering, in imagery, and in rhythm - a poem of the first order, worthy to rank with anything of Tennyson or Browning. O si sic omnia! "

(from The Saturday Review, November 12, 1898 pp 644-5.
The critic found the Odes a failure, and the reading of them a torture.)

"Mr. Meredith's Odes."

In his later poetry Mr. George Meredith taxes the fidelity of his loyal admirers rather severely. We can honestly say that few things would give us greater pleasure than to offer a tribute of cordial and unstinted praise to these odes on the history of France.

Their/

Their author is, to-day, of living English writers still militant and active, the one around whom most of sympathy and admiration centres. We are proud of him; we delight in the fine attitude of his mind; he relinquishes nothing in his fight with what is poor and commonplace. But even in his prose, and even in the best of his prose, there are elements of confusion and extravagance that bring a cloud across our satisfaction, while in his verse, and especially in the worst of his verse, these chaotic qualities take a prominence which destroys the greater part of our pleasure. When we have read the volume before us with bewilderment and acute mental distress, we feel inclined to make a despairing appeal to the eminent author himself, to ask him, with all respect and humility, whether he can really defend the system on which these odes are composed, and what he would think of them if they were presented to him as the work of another person. If they showed signs of weakness or decay we should be very careful to avoid, so far as possible, any disrespectful reference to the fact; but they do not. The voice is as triumphant as ever, the intellectual force as rapid and authoritative; it is the scheme of poetics which seems to us so arrogantly false. Even Mr. Meredith must not write like this and expect nothing but commendation from his critics.

The "Odes" are four in number, and they deal with the Revolution, with Napoleon, with the Invasion of 1870, and with the problem of Alsace-Lorraine. The third of these has long been known to us, for it was published twenty-eight years ago; the other three, but especially the first and fourth, bear internal evidence of having been recently composed. Comparison between, let us say, the third and the first, shows in how striking a degree Mr. Meredith has permitted the peculiarities of his style to grow upon him since 1870. The Invasion ode does not rank very high among Mr. Meredith's poems of the same general date, but it is astonishingly lucid and intelligible when compared with the odes of 1898. What we discover, by this convenient parallel, to have grown upon Mr. Meredith is the desire to dazzle and deafen the reader. The phrases are now more gorgeous than they were, the illustrations more astonishing, the

rhetorical/

"For the belted Overshadower hard the course,
 On whom devolves the spirit's touchstone, Force;
 Which is the strenuous arm, to strike inclined,
 That too much adamantine makes the mind;
 Forgets its coin of Nature's rich Exchange;
 Contracts horizons within present sight;
 Amalekite to-day, across its range
 Indisputable, to-morrow Simeonite."

We will not awaken controversy by saying that this has no meaning; but we will be bold enough to say that it has no beauty, that it fails to produce any one of the effects upon which poetry bases its claim to human attention.

Disapproving, as we must have the candour to do, the whole system on which these odes are composed, and denying to them, in spite of their eloquence and force, any pretension to be called successful as poems, we hasten to speak of what we can enjoy in compositions so wilful and grotesque. First of all, even in the precipitous jumble of their imagery, they frequently bear witness to their author's extraordinary observation of natural objects. If we free ourselves from the bondage of Mr. Meredith's intolerable emphasis by taking one of his thundering tirades to pieces, we shall often be rewarded by a line or a phrase of concentrated vision. Such verses as "sack-like droop bronze pears on the railed branch-frontage", and such a couplet as -

"Forth from her bearded tube of lacquey brass
 Reverberant notes and long blew volent France,"

show what a magician Mr. Meredith can be. A group of words, such as:-

"the robber wasp
 That in the hanging apple makes a nest,
 And carves a face of abscess where as fruit
 Ripe ruddy,"

shows how he can abuse his magic, because the image here, although marvellously seen, is so preposterously over-emphatic in the context that we forget all about the historical aspect of which Mr. Meredith is speaking, and think of nothing but the intolerably vivid image. So that fancy here defeats its own object, and, while professing to illuminate its theme, merely drowns it in a momentary glare of blinding limelight.

The "Napoleon" ode is certainly the best, and offers us a somewhat vague but large and elevated portrait of a great man with whom

Mr. Meredith's sympathy is not of yesterday. The strophe beginning "Ah! what a dawn of splendour" is less turbid than usual, and offers us some magnificent rhetoric of the order of Shelley's "Ode to Naples" and Mr. Swinburne's "Eve of Revolution". It is sustained, too, in a pure flow of reverberating pomp, and not spoiled, as is so frequently the case, by such sudden intolerable interpolations as

"The friable and the grumous, dizzards both",
certainly, one of the most extraordinary lines in the English language. The character of Napoleon is analysed in the earlier strophes of this ode with great penetration and with a directness and clearness which is like that of some serious passage in Boileau or Pope, very acute and just, although essentially unimaginative. On the whole, however, the most delightful passage in the volume, and that which torments us least with over-emphasis or a restless search after oddity, after the unusual, is the temperate and generous praise of France in the tenth strophe of "Alsace-Lorraine". Had all, or much, been like this, we should not have had to record, with genuine grief, our conviction that this ambitious cycle of odes had better have been left unattempted."

(from The Athenaeum, December 24, 1898 page 885. Article entitled 'Mr. Meredith's French Historical Odes')

'Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History'.

"It is well to possess the intellectual strength of a giant; but to use it like a giant is to be a source of unrest to the devout. When Mr. Meredith evolved the preface to 'Diana of the Crossways', it was admitted to contain some of the darkest sayings in English prose. But in the present volume he has summoned to his aid the resources of a form of art which offers even greater possibilities for the darkening of counsel. Browning, in one of his letters, says: "I never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed." And indeed the fact that he liked, as in "Sordello", to deal allusively with names and episodes drawn from the less-known chapters of history may sometimes account for his alleged obscurity. Mr. Meredith has no such excuse in the volume before us. He has chosen themes of which the historical details are familiar to every moderately/

moderately educated man. The arbitrary caprice of his manner - for one hesitates to describe it more emphatically - can only commend itself to those with whom the master's name justifies him of all his works, however wanton. It is true that the obscurity does not here arise from defective vision in the author; but neither this reflection nor the splendid beauty of his intervals of lucidity can adequately console the reader for the unnecessary pains to which he is put. Nor have we here the kind of rugged strength which Time is supposed to mellow to sweetness:-

"Sweet for the future, strong for the nonce."

Unless this is indeed the language of the future, one can hardly hope for posterity to unravel what the writer's contemporaries, if they are honest, confess to be at times beyond them. And the title of it is a 'Contribution to the Song of French History'. Yet, if we except the fine sweeping measure of the second movement in 'Alsace-Lorraine', that tells of the restorative power of Nature and the Hours, with their

"Balm of a sound Earth's primary heart at its active beat," there is scarcely a note of pure "song" in all these odes. Imaginative force there is, without rival in modern poetry; fertility, too, of language such as Mr. Swinburne or Mr. Francis Thompson alone could compass, but involved and weighted with a pregnancy of meaning which the author of 'Songs before Sunrise' would contentedly have resigned for greater beauty of sound.

But in this volume Mr. Meredith stands revealed as his own best critic. What is at once the most convincing testimony to his earlier power in this kind of writing and the sternest comment on certain characteristics of his later achievements is to be found in the ode to 'France', written in December, 1870, and now republished from his "Ballads and Poems". Here is the same imaginative force, the same fertility of language, the same pregnancy of meaning; but clear, but ordered, but noble in its rhythmic dignity. Let a typical passage be taken from this earlier ode:-

She/

"She, with the plunging lightnings overshot,
 With madness for an armour against pain,
 With milkless breasts for little ones athirst,
 And round her all her noblest dying in vain,
 Mother of Reason is she, trebly cursed,
 To feel, to see, to justify the blow;
 Chamber to chamber of her sequent brain
 Gives answer of the cause of her great woe,
 Inexorably echoing thro' the vaults,
 "'Tis thus they reap in blood, in blood who sow:
 This is the sum of self-absolved faults."
 Doubt not that thro' her grief, with sight supreme,
 Thro' her delirium and despair's last dream,
 Thro' pride, thro' bright illusion and the brood
 Bewildering of her various Motherhood,
 The high strong light within her, tho' she bleeds,
 Traces the letters of returned misdeeds.
 She sees what seed long sown, ripened of late,
 Bears this fierce crop; and she discerns her fate
 From origin to agony, and on
 As far as the wave washes long and wan
 Off one disastrous impulse : for of waves
 Our life is, and our deeds are pregnant graves
 Blown rolling to the sunset from the dawn. "

Or, again, the trenchant lines from the same earlier ode:-

"The gay young generations mask her grief;
 Where bled her children hangs the loaded sheaf.
 Forgetful is green earth; the Gods alone
 Remember everlastingly : they strike
 Remorselessly, and ever like for like.
 By their great memories the Gods are known. "

Compare with these a later passage from 'Revolution', where the
 "young Angelical" - presumably the Spirit of Liberty - looks down
 upon the dreadful ending of the work that France had begun for love
 of him:-

"Her thousand impulses, like torches, coursed
 City and field; and pushed abroad
 O'er hungry waves to thirsty sands,
 Flaring at further; she had grown to be
 The headless with the fearful hands:
 To slaughter, else to suicide enforced.
 But he, remembering how his love began,
 And of what creature, pitied when was plain
 Another measure of captivity
 The need for strap and rod:
 The penitential prayers again;
 Again the bitter bowing down to dust;
 The burden on the flesh for who disclaims the God
 The answer when is call upon the Just. "

Compare also with his younger work these lines from 'Alsace-Lorraine',
 that have the air of Carlyle turned metrist. The "Purgatorial
 Saint" seems to be Napoleon, with whom the "credible ghost" is also,
 apparently, identical:-

"Mark where a credible ghost pulls bridle to view that bare
 Corpse of a field still reddening cloud, and alive in its throes
 Beneath her Purgatorial Saint's evocative stare:

.....

The/

The golden eagles flap lame wings,
 The black double-headed are round their flanks.
 He is there in midst of the pupils he harried to
 brain-awake, trod into union; lo,
 These are his Epic's tutored Dardans, yon that
 Rhapsod'es Achaeans to know.
 Nor is aught of an equipollent conflict seen, nor
 the weaker's flashed device;
 Headless is offered a breast to beaks deliberate,
 formal, assured, precise."

And once again, from the same ode:-

"She read the things that are;
 Reality unaccepted read
 For sign of the distraught, and took her blow
 To brain; herself read through;
 Wherefore her predatory Glory paid
 Napoleon ransom knew."

To turn for relief and in conclusion to those admirable qualities of subtle perception and keen incisiveness which we have learnt to look for in all Mr. Meredith's work, the passages in which they are most effectively illustrated are perhaps those that treat of the resilient energy with which France recovered from her fall, and those that sum up the character of Napoleon in relation to his country:-

"He loved her more than little, less than much.
 The fair subservient of Imperial Fact
 Next to his consanguineous was placed
 In ranked esteem; above the diurnal meal,
 Vexatious carnal appetites above,
 Above his hoards, while she Imperial Fact embraced,
 And rose but at command from under heel.
 The love devolvent, the ascension love,
 Receptive or profuse, were fires he lacked,
 Whose marrow had expelled their wasteful sparks,
 Whose mind, the vast machine of endless haste,
 Took up but solids for its glowing seal."

Can this last word conceivably be a misprint for meal?

Here, in this ode to 'Napoleon', for all its profusion of imagery, Mr. Meredith often concentrates his strength in memorably pungent phrases:-

"Frigid the netting smile on whom he wooed,
 But on his Policy his eye was lewd."

"A nursery screamer where dialectics ruled:
 Mannerless, graceless, laughterless, unlike
 Herself in all."

"She reads her Tyrant through his golden mist;
 Perceives him fast to a harsher Tyrant bound;
 Self-riden, self-hunted, captive of his aim."

"He loathed his land's divergent parties, loth
To grant them speech, they were such idle troops;
The friable and the grumous, dizzards both."

There is a touch of Lewis Carroll here. "

(from Literature, November 26, 1898 under Reviews.
Though admitting the great qualities of his poetry this
review is a protest against Meredith's increasing obscurity.)

"More than a quarter of a century ago, while France was lying prostrate under the heel of the German invader, Mr. Meredith published in the Fortnightly Review what many people regarded, and still regard, as one of the noblest of his poems. It was great, not only in pure poetic quality, but in dignity of attitude and wisdom of counsel. Full of passionate sympathy with the conquered nation, with that

"Bellona and Bacchante, rushing forth
On yon stout marching schoolmen of the North,"

the poet was yet able to look with the calm gaze of justice upon the conqueror - able, too, to see the Nemesis in her fate, and to tell the truth to her even while her misery wrung his heart. "France, December, 1870," was a real contribution to the "Song of French History" - a genuine anticipation of the epic of the future. Mr. Meredith has dealt many a shrewd satirical blow at the Teutonic stock, both before and since, and delivered himself of not a few lyrical extravagances in praise of the Celt; but one felt that in this poem his genius had lifted him into a serener atmosphere and to heights of a broader outlook, and that he had managed to view that Titanic world-struggle of contending races as much with the impersonal and impartial eye of the historian as with the all-embracing sympathy of the poet.

The years that have elapsed since the first publication of this magnificent ode and its reappearance in the volume before us as one of four lyrical pieces, in which he recites the storied song of French history from 1789 to the present day, have in nowise altered Mr. Meredith's attitude towards his great theme. Throughout "The Revolution" and "Napoleon", the two pieces which precede the re-published "France", there runs the same consciousness of the essential unity of this mighty, age-long drama, with the splendid madness of its opening scenes and the terrible retribution of its climax; while the/
the/

"The friable and the grumous, dizzards both,"

no such enigmatic metaphors as

"him her young
In whirled imagination mastodonized;"

no such mysterious questionings as

"Does nought so loosen our sight from the
despot heart, to receive
Balm of a sound Earth's primary heart at
its active beat;"

no such cryptic references to the processes of Nature, as

"Creatures of forest and mead, Earth's essays in being, all kinds
Bound by the navel-knot to the mother, never astray,
They in the ear upon ground will pour their intuitive minds,
Cut man's tangles for Earth's first broad rectilinear way,
Admonishing loftier reaches, the rich adventurous shoots,
Pushes of tentative curves, embryonic upwreathings in air;"

no such syntactic cruces as

"We see a Paris burn
Or France Napoleon. "

In the whole three hundred lines or so of the earlier poem, though it has its occasional obscurities, there is nothing to compare with the above extracts, which belong, in truth, to a later period of Mr. Meredith's art - to a period when the purely intellectual part of him has mastered the emotional part and the foaming torrent of his vocabulary has submerged both. In this cataclysm it is not only simplicity which has been swept away, but beauty also, even the mere form of poetry itself. In the long-lined metres, of which the last two extracts afford examples, this is especially noticeable. Except for the tag of the rhyme at the end they might often be mistaken for mere Whitmanese, their metrical regularity, such as it is, being almost lost in their dissonance.

And yet, as if to show that this unbridled revel of words, this persistent pursuing of a fanciful thought through the tangled under-wood of a too luxuriant diction, is but the result of a habit which has grown upon Mr. Meredith, we find him at the outset of the finest of the three new poems still able, when he chooses, or, at any rate, for as long as this inveterate habit will let him, to strike as grandly resonant a note as ever

Cannon/

THE NATURE POEMS
OF
GEORGE MEREDITH.
1898.

Reviews:

- * The Times, August 4, 1898 p. 12.
- The Manchester Guardian, August 16, 1898, p. 9.
- The Daily Chronicle, August 18, 1898, p. 3, by John Davidson.
- * The Athenaeum, November 5, 1898, p. 647.
- * Literature, November 19, 1898, p. 463.
- * The Saturday Review, November 2, 1907, p. 550.
- The Pall Mall Gazette, November 22, 1907, p. 3.
- The Manchester Guardian, December 7, 1907, p. 5.
- The Tribune, December 30, 1907, p. 2.
- * The Bookman, January 1908, p. 183.
- * The Athenaeum, January 4, 1908, p. 20.

THE NATURE POEMS

OF

GEORGE MEREDITH

1898.

(From The Times : Thursday, August, 4, 1898 page 12 :
Books of the Week).

"The latest evidence of Mr. George Meredith's growing popularity is the appearance of an illustrated edition of his NATURE POEMS (Constable). This large, slim, and beautifully printed volume contains all the old favourites - "The Thrush in February", "Night of Frost in May", "Love in the Valley", etc. - but its novelty lies in the very effective photogravures after Mr. William Hyde's illustrative landscapes. These are Constable-like renderings of scenes taken, we imagine, for the most part in the pine districts of Surrey. It would not be true to say that these pictures illustrate Mr. Meredith's poems any more exactly than they would illustrate other poems of Nature, but when bound up in a comely volume with them they help to create an atmosphere, and thus increase the pleasure of the reader."

(From The Athenaeum : November 5, 1898 page 647. Under
'Fine Arts. Christmas Books'.)

"The volume containing The Nature Poems of George Meredith, illustrated by W. Hyde (Constable & Co.) is beautifully printed and tastefully bound. The selection includes the shorter, but not least exquisite verses of the author of 'Love in the Valley', and it comprises that famous idyl itself. It could not have been more judiciously made. The designs are landscapes executed in black and white, reproduced in a sort of fine mezzotint by the Swan Electric Engraving Company, whose process admits of an extraordinary amount of finish, clearness, and delicate grading, without loss of brilliance. These landscapes aim at rendering the sentiment which inspires the poems, and, generally speaking, they succeed to a high degree and are almost unexpectedly charming. There are a few rather commonplace exceptions, but they do not count for much compared with those which really and
adequately/

Westermair". Mr. Hyde's pictures, well reproduced, made an appropriate and dignified addition to the book. His beech-trees and clouds are admirable, and his landscapes without colour show a rare sense of the charm of pure Nature, in summer and winter, in vast spaces and in confined woods, by night and day."

(From The Athenaeum : January 4, 1908 page 20 :
Fine Arts : Our Library Table : The Nature Poems of
George Meredith. Illustrated by W. Hyde (Constable & Co.))

"It is a rare occurrence to find an entirely harmonious conjunction of poet and illustrator, but Mr. William Hyde's pictures to 'The Nature Poems of George Meredith' are, in themselves, poems of tone and design. Indeed, the artist appears to have seen eye to eye with the poet. It is difficult to single out any special instances for praise from these sixteen drawings, each of which is a small masterpiece of its kind; but 'Winter Heavens', with its luminous stars above the dark pines and the snow; the romantic vision for the 'Hymn to Colour'; and the wonderfully atmospheric epitome of London, 'A City clothed in Snow and Soot', are perhaps among the more remarkable of this artist's genius. There is no indication to show that the present volume is virtually a new edition published at a price more within the scope of shallow purses than the first issue, which appeared in 1898. We are, however, none the less appreciative of the publisher's enterprise; while these plates compare not at all favourably with the admirable printing of those of the first and limited edition."

A READING OF LIFE,

WITH OTHER POEMS.

BY GEORGE MEREDITH

1901.

Reviews:

The Morning Post, February 27, 1901, p. 3.

March 27, 1901, p. 3.

The Daily Chronicle, March 1, 1901, p. 5.

June 8, 1901, p. 3.

New York Journal, April 27, 1901, p. 34, by Richard le Gallienne.

The Post, Chicago, June 1, 1901 by Harriet Monroe.

The New York Times, June 8, 1901.

The Transcript, Boston, Mass., June 11, 1901 by Annie K. Tuell.

* Literature, June 15, 1901, pp. 517-8.

* The Academy, June 29, 1901, pp. 547-8.

* July 6, 1901, p. 18; letter from H. P. Wright.

* The Fortnightly Review, July 1901, pp. 159-161 by Stephen Gwynn.

* The Saturday Review, July 13, 1901, pp. 49-50 by Arthur Symonds.

* The Athenaeum, July 20, 1901, pp. 81-2.

The Sunday Times, August 4, 1901, p. 2, by C. J.

The Nation, New York, August 22, 1901, p. 152.

* The Monthly Review, October 1901, pp. 20-21.

A READING OF LIFE

WITH OTHER POEMS.

1901.

(From Literature, June 15, 1901 pages 517, 518, under section 'Current Literature', entitled "Mr. Meredith's Poems".)

'A Reading of Life, with other Poems by George Meredith'.

"In his new volume Mr. Meredith supplies a sort of companion to "A Reading of Earth". In that collection he set forth, more clearly perhaps than elsewhere, his sense of the earth-spirit which stirs in all sensitive natures, and institutes a relationship of brotherhood between man and the inanimate children of earth. In the present instance, the point of view is changed, and life is regarded from its spiritual side, and as engaged in a species of perpetual conflict. As so often in Mr. Meredith's poetry, the animating thought is involved in so many subtle, interlacing tendrils of imagination and under-thought that at first sight it appears more elaborate and tricky than it really is; but reduced to its lowest denomination the thesis of the poem is exceedingly simple. Two spirits are in conflict in man's nature; the athletic, energetic instinct, which Mr. Meredith portrays as the spirit of Artemis, and the indulgent, languorous instinct, which is the spirit of Aphrodite. Both alike make insistent appeal to human nature, but neither is to be trusted exclusively. The man of unimpeded action starves his spiritual side; the man of passion loses the name of actor and dissipates his power in futile imaginings. It is in the middle way that sanity lies; the sane mind in the sane body is secured by a divided allegiance to the two goddesses.

This is a simple enough theme, but in its treatment Mr. Meredith, as is his wont, illuminates his work with penetrating and poignant thoughts no less than with many delicate and exquisite touches of the imagination. The two pictures of Artemis and Aphrodite, in particular, afford him opportunity for well-wrought and carefully arranged contrast. Here is Artemis:-

"Nought of perilous she recks;
Valour clothes her open breast;
Sweet beyond the thrill of sex;
Hallowed by the sex confessed.

Huntress/

Huntress arrowy to pursue,
 Colder she than sunless dew,
 She, that breath of upper air;
 Ay, but never lyrist sang,
 Draught of Bacchus never sprang
 Blood the bliss of gods to share,
 High o'er sweep of eagle wings,
 Like the run with her, when rings
 Clear her rally, and her dart
 In the forests' cavern heart,
 Tells of her victorious aim."

And here Aphrodite:-

" Shorn of attendant Graces she can use
 Her natural snares to make her will supreme.
 A simple nymph it is, inclined to muse
 Before the leader foot shall dip in stream:
 One arm at curve along a rounded thigh;
 Her firm new breasts each pointing its own way,
 A knee half bent to shade its fellow shy,
 Where innocence, not nature, signals nay."

It is needless to point out the extreme felicity of this beautiful picture, or to expatiate upon the subtle and sincere intention of the line "Hallowed by the sex confessed" in the equally vivid interpretation of Artemis. Such beauties are clear upon the surface. But it may be added that the whole volume is marked by a much greater degree of lucidity and poetic grace than Mr. Meredith sometimes allows himself in poetry, and that the corresponding gain in charm and persuasiveness, is clearly marked. It is true that there are still a few of those discordant and manufactured words from which his later manner is never, unfortunately, free, and that there are sometimes lines, more especially in the hexametrical versions of Homer, where eccentricity gets the better of melody. But these are rather exceptions than commonplaces; and the prevailing note of the volume is one of diverse and delicate harmonies.

" They have no song, the sedges dry,
 And still they sing
 It is within my breast they sing,
 As I pass by.
 Within my breast they touch a string,
 They wake a sigh.
 There is but sound of sedges dry;
 In me they sing."

And again:-

" If that thou hast the gift of strength, then know
 Thy part is to uplift the trodden low;
 Else in a giant's grasp until the end
 A hopeless wrestler shall thy soul contend. "

There is in the first of these a melody, and in the second a lucidity,

that could not be surpassed for simplicity and directness of effect. Mr. Meredith is certainly at his best when he is content with these clear and searching methods of expression."

(From The Academy : June 29, 1901 pp.547-8. Under Reviews: Mr. Meredith's New Volume.)

"A new volume of poems by George Meredith! It warms one's anticipations; we know we cannot be entirely defrauded of matter for delight, whether or not it be on a level with the work we loved of yore. That quick and vigorous brain can never work to mere futility; some matter will come from it. Meredith, the poet, we bear fresh in memory (for there are two George Merediths - a duality in unity, poet and novelist). Convolutioned thought; rapid force, zig-zagging with lightning swiftness and abruptness; magnetic and quivering to the finger-tips with that super-subtilised emotional vitality we call poetry; spinning images into the air like coin, with an audacious joy in watching how they will come down - such is Meredith the poet. Withal, a certain Browningsque obscurity, arising partly from a Browningsque carelessness to connexions. William Morris, in Manchester, once accused his "cursed Celtic love of fine language", which had obscured the plain meaning he would fain have driven to the head in his audience. Mr. Meredith has no small portion in this "cursed Celtic love of fine language" - Apollo Delphicus be thanked for it, amid the present cursed Saxon love of corrugated iron language! But more overmastering than this, for good or for evil, is his Celtic impetuosity. It sweeps him into the avalanche precipitance of "Attila" (Attila, our Attila!); and into the most exasperating insolences of grammar - nay, too heedless for so conscious a word as "insolence". They are not absent in this book:

"Or shall we run with Artemis
Or yield the breast to Aphrodite?
Both are mighty;
Both give bliss;
Each can torture if divided;
Each claims worship undivided."

Aided by the sequent line, we discern "Each can torture if divided" to mean "if worship be divided between them". But grammatically

the/

the line cannot mean this; and it might be a puzzling matter to decide what it did mean, were it not for that illuminating sequent line. Nevertheless, this volume is notably freer from grammatical puzzles, ambiguous ellipses, docked connective particles or pronouns, and lapsed interstitial words in general, than has been the case with Mr. Meredith's previous poems. It certainly gains in clearness.

One cannot say that any poem rises to the height of the author's foregone achievement. Yet of all it can be said that no other man could have written them; and there are poems where the old Meredithian fire flames forth in welcome fashion. With "The Huntress" he darts forth impetuous of movement, and with daring lance-flings of expression, remarkable in such a veteran of the poetic chase. Hear him:

"Down her course a serpent star
Coils and shatters at her heels;
.....
Those are her white-lightning limbs
Cleaving loads of leafy gloom.
Mountains hear her and call back,
Shrewd with night: a frosty wail
Distant: her the emerald vale
Folds, and wonders in her track.
Now her retinue is lean,
Many rearward; streams the chase
Eager forth of covert; seen
One hot tide the rapturous race.
Quiver-charged and crescent-crowned,
Up on a flash the lighted mound
Leaps she, bow to shoulder, shaft
Strung to barb with archer's craft,
Legs like plaited lyre-chords, feet
Songs to see, past pitch of sweet.
.....
Follow we their silver flame.
Pride of flesh from bondage free
Marks her servitors, and she
Sanctifies the unembraced.
Nought of perilous she recks;
Valour clothes her open breast;
Sweet beyond the thrill of sex."

That catches the blood in its vivid vision, the racing bound of the verse, the phrase cast like a pebble from the sinewy hand. The image, "legs like plaited lyre-chords", may strike at first like the sudden surge of chill water to the chest, making you catch your breath with a scarce-welcome surprise, and doubt whether you like it. But it is most apt to the thing imaged, when you come to grasp the idea. It indicates the tensivity of the lyre-chord, strung to pitch; and compares this to the tensivity of the limbs out-stretched, new-lighted from their leap. So it is with other phrases in the poem, and

throughout/

throughout Mr. Meredith's work: after their first brusque novelty, you grow to relish them.

Yet of the poems as a whole, we have suggested that they are not the complete Meredith; though they do not fail in those new and significant facets of thought which we expect this writer to startle us with wherever we glance at him. Thought; apt image, often bold, even audacious, as is the way with Mr. Meredith; expression drawn tense to the arrow-head; all these things are there. What, then, is lacking? Well, all these we have in Mr. Meredith's prose: but the indescribable, unnameable lift, the swift or subtle wing-sweep of emotion preterhuman - in our staled word, divine - which sends through a verse the electric current, or air from heaven, we call poetry; this incommunicable thing is somehow felt wanting, save by flashes. Mr. Meredith's prose is often half-poetry: but to make it absolute poetry something more is needed than to fling it into verse. Yet of such nature, it seems to us, is the bulk of these verses; which (by who shall say what elusive degree?) are just not vinum merum of song - the unallayed wine of poetry. We miss that last refinement and white light of emotion which severs Mr. Meredith's subtlest prose from his authentic poetry. It is difficult to find a poem of quotable length which will example our meaning. Perhaps "The Hueless Love" is the nearest:

" Unto that love must we through fire attain
Which those two held as breath of common air;
The hands of whom were held in bond elsewhere;
Whom Honour was untroubled to restrain.

Midway the road of our life's term they met,
And one another knew without surprise;
Nor cared that beauty stood in mutual eyes;
Nor at their tardy meeting nursed regret.

To them it was revealed how they had found
The kindred nature and the needed mind;
The mate by long conspiracy designed;
The flower to plant in sanctuary ground

Avowed in vigilant solicitude
For either, what most lived within each breast
They let be seen: yet every human test
Demanding righteousness approved them good.

She leaned on a strong arm, and little feared
Abandonment to help if heard or sank
Her heart at intervals while Love looked blank,
Life rosier were she but less revered.

An arm that never shook did not obscure
 Her woman's intuition of the bliss -
 Their tempter's moment o'er the black abyss,
 Across the narrow plank - he could abjure.

Then came a day that clipped for him the thread,
 And their first touch of lips, as he lay cold,
 Was all of earthly in their love untold,
 Beyond all earthly known to them who wed.

So has there come the gust at South-west flung,
 By sudden volt on eves of freezing mist,
 When sister snowflake sister snowdrop kissed,
 As one passed out, and one the bell-head hung."

Here, as it appears to us, in the first two stanzas and the last we feel the touch of poetry. But the main portion of the poem is a piece of subtle and imaginatively couched analysis such as occurs constantly in Mr. Meredith's novels, just as close in the gateways of poetry, but no further. Really to understand our criticism, however, it is necessary to read the longer poems as wholes. None of the shorter pieces effectually bears out what we have been saying, for these do not exhibit the higher flashes in which we meet again the Meredith of former poems. Yet it is in the dangerous comparison with himself that this present volume falls short: for any new writer it would be the beginning of a reputation. That the fire and eagerness as of twenty should still animate many of the poems is a remarkable tribute to the green vigour of the elder race, which few of the rising generation can hope to emulate."

(From The Academy July 6, 1901. page 18, under 'Correspondence'. This letter by H. P. Wright refers to the review in the Academy of June 29.)

"What is true Poetry?"

Sir, - Your issue of June 29 affords much help towards the solution of this question.

In your article on Mr. Meredith's new volume you make it clear that a true poem must be pervaded through and through with a spirit of deep emotion. The heaven-born Promethean fire must not be wanting; else the reader is left cold, his pulses are not stirred, his interest is not quickened. True poetry, as Matthew Arnold teaches us, has a power to form, sustain, and delight our souls. It is evident, if it can do all this, that it must appeal to the emotions. It must be

the/

the medium by means of which the emotion is conveyed from the soul of the poet to our own.

There is a tendency in certain quarters to see very little merit in our modern poetry. But surely - to mention the name of one present-day poet - those who are acquainted at all with the poems of Mr. William Watson know how exquisitely he can give expression to his emotions. "Vita Nuova" may be referred to as an instance of his power in this respect.

I should like to quote the passage beginning:

"We the Spring,
Me also, dimly with new life hath touched,
And with regenerate hope, the salt of life; "

but it is too long to give in a short letter.

In the current issue of the Academy you quote the words of the Professor of Poetry at Oxford, in which he insists on the necessity of suggestiveness in poetry.

What is it that makes that phrase of Aeschylus, which may be rendered "the myriad smile" (*ἀννπιθόνος γελασμά*) of ocean, a possession for ever to the lover of poetry? Is it not the suggestiveness of it? Does it not call up to our view the vast surface of the sea sparkling in the sunlight?

There is one more essential of true poetry : it is beauty. The poet can only successfully appeal to our emotions or suggest thoughts to us if his verses have a haunting melody and chasm^(sic) of diction.

I am, etc.,

H. P. WRIGHT."

(From The Fortnightly Review (edited by W. L. Courtney); July 1901 pp.159-161. This extract forms the beginning of a 10 page article on 'Some Recent Books' by Stephen Gwynn. W. L. Courtney had himself written the review of 'Poems and Lyrics' in The Fortnightly of November 1883)

"We continue, all of us, to write books and read books, and one way or another the business is kept up to a fairly high level of accomplishment. But in looking over the publications of the last three months or so, it seems difficult to point to anything for which prolonged existence can be even anticipated. It is true there was

a great clangour of trumpets on the appearance of Mr. Marriott's clever novel, *The Column*; we were bidden to salute the advent of a new literary force. I heard so much of the trumpeting that the edge was off my susceptibilities before I approached the book itself : but so far as I can attempt an unprejudiced judgment, it would be expressed by recalling the eternally misquoted aphorism of Capability Brown. In Mr. Marriott's writing you cannot see the trees for the wood. There are fine things there, and clever things; but they are smothered in a jungle of other things, all of which want to be just as fine and clever, but are not. And although in the future we all expect to hear more of Mr. Marriott, it is probably that, at his debut, we heard considerably more of him than the circumstances warranted. From Mr. Marriott subtract so much of Mr. George Meredith as Mr. Marriott has been able to assimilate, and what do you leave? The answer to that sum has yet to be worked out.

Mr. Meredith, himself, is undoubtedly one of the immortals - an immortal who has grown old, sed cruda deo viridisque senectus. He was writing novels before George Eliot, and now he is writing verses which have more of the sap and fire, the greenness and ardour of youth, than are to be found in almost any poetry of to-day. One may resent the continual obscurity, the frequent harshness of expression; but these faults are found in the Greeks, and Mr. Meredith has much of the quality which makes it worth while to disentangle the sense of an Aeschylean chorus. And a mere look at the page is enough : the words are the words of a poet, whether you understand them or not : for instance this opening of *The Night Walk*:-

"Awakes for me and leaps from shroud,
All radiantly the moon's own night,
Of folded showers in streamer cloud;
Our shadows down the highway white,
Or deep in woodland woven-boughed,
With yon and yon a stem alight.

I see marauder runagates,
Across us shoot their dusky wink;
I hear the parliament of chats
In haws beside the river's brink;
And drops the role off alder-banks,
To push his arrow through the stream."

What are the "marauder runagates"? and how do they "shoot a dusky wink"?

Commentators/

Commentators will be sorely vexed to settle, it seems to me; and if Mr. Meredith were at the beginning of his career it would be worth while to find fault. But, as it is, one need only observe how the passage conveys the sense of moonlit night in a place of trees and water, with the life and the low noises of the night. And this is done, not by the obscurities but in spite of them; done partly by the physical suggestion in the vowel sounds and associations of certain key words - such as "awake" and "radiantly" - but far more by the unintelligible magic of things perfectly intelligible. Why should the words, "Our shadows down the highway white", convey instantly a sense of cool freshness? or why should "woodland woven-boughed" make one think of dew falling? I do not know; I only know that poetry does these things, and because Mr. Meredith can do them I call him a poet. The gift, indeed, runs through his whole work; he has a peculiar power of diffusing atmosphere whether around a place or a person. But, I repeat, he does not do this by being unintelligible, and the less intelligible he is the more he fails in his first business as a writer. Fifty years ago it would have seemed an absurd truism to state this; nowadays it is a very necessary qualification of praise. The passages in this volume, which an ordinary lover of poetry will read with sincere and unalloyed pleasure, are those where this quality of magical suggestion co-exists with a meaning reasonably accessible: as it is almost throughout in the superb praise of Artemis, "huntress arrowy to pursue", who stands for a symbol of man's alternative ideal:-

"Quiver-charged and crescent-crowned
Up on a flash the lighted mound,
Leaps she, bow to shoulder, shaft
Strung to barb with archer's craft,
Legs like plaited lyre-chords, feet
Songs to see, past pitch of sweet.
Fearful wildness they outrun,
Shaggy wildness, grey or dun,
Challenge, charge of tusks elude:
Theirs the dance to tame the rude;
Beast and beast in manhood tame,
Follow we their silver flame.
Pride of flesh from bondage free,
Reaping vigour of its waste,
Marks her servitors, and she
Sanctifies the unembraced."

It is curious to note that after all his verse-writing Mr. Meredith has never wholly mastered the medium. Even this short and beautiful passage contains one obvious tag, the phrase "with archer's craft", and

another, which is worse than merely a tag, being an interruption to the flow of rhythm and expression. "Past pitch of sweet" is harsh in grammar, harsh in sound, and it positively detracts from the sense of the couplet, -

"Legs like plaited lyre-chords, feet
Songs to see."

would have been immeasurably better. One ought so to concede to the necessities of rhyme, as seeming to gain an advantage. But there was certainly some bad fairy at Mr. Meredith's christening.

However, it is within the bounds of possibility that the bad fairy's influence may prove evanescent, and posterity be only aware of the other gifts so prodigally bestowed. It would be easy to point to many works which, blamed on their appearance from obscurity, now seem lucid as the day. And a great part of Mr. Meredith's work has already passed definitely into the common heritage. When Mr. Herbert Paul wants to suggest Gibbon's personal characteristics in early manhood, he has only to compare him to the wise youth Adrian, and there is no more to be said. That resumes in a single view all that Mr. Paul has been saying, and saying very well.

STEPHEN GWYNH."

(From The Saturday Review : July 13, 1901, by Arthur Symons. Symons had written a careful and appreciative review of Meredith's poetry in September 1887 for The Westminster Review. He was probably one of the most clear-sighted of Meredith's admirers. The review 'A Reading of Life' quoted below appears on pages 49, 50 and is entitled 'George Meredith as Poet'.)

"Mr. Meredith has always suffered from the curse of too much ability. He has both genius and talent, but the talent, instead of acting as a counterpoise to the genius, blows it yet more windily about the air. He has almost all the qualities of a great writer, but some perverse spirit in his blood has mixed them to their mutual undoing. When he writes prose, the prose seems always about to burst into poetry; when he writes verse, the verse seems always about to sink into prose. He thinks in flashes, and writes in shorthand. He has an intellectual passion for words, but he has never been able to accustom his mind to the slowness of their service; he tosses them about the page in his
anger/

anger, tearing them open and gutting them with a savage pleasure. He has so fastidious a fear of dirtying his hands with what other hands have touched that he makes the language over again, so as to avoid writing a sentence or a line as anyone else could have written it. His hatred of the commonplace becomes a mania, and it is by his headlong hunt after the best that he has lost by the way its useful enemy, good. In prose he would have every sentence shine, in verse he would have every line sparkle; like a lady who puts on all her jewellery at once, immediately after breakfast. As his own brain never rests, he does not realise that there are other brains which feel fatigue; and as his own taste is for what is hard, ringing, showy, drenched with light, he does not leave any cool shadows to be a home for gentle sounds, in the whole of his work. His books are like picture galleries, in which every inch of wall is covered, and picture screams at picture across its narrow division of frame. Almost every picture is good, but each suffers from its context. As time goes on, Mr. Meredith's mannerisms have grown rigid, like old bones. Exceptions have become rules, experiments have been accepted for solutions.

In Mr. Meredith's earliest verse there is a certain harshness, which seems to come from a too urgent desire to be at once concise and explicit. "Modern Love", published in 1862, remains Mr. Meredith's masterpiece in poetry, and it will always remain, beside certain things of Donne and of Browning, an astonishing feat in the vivisection of the heart in verse. It is packed with imagination, but with imagination of so nakedly human a kind that there is hardly an ornament, hardly an image, in the verse: it is like scraps of broken of heart-broken, talk, overheard and jotted down at random, hardly suggesting a story, but burning into one like the touch of a corroding acid. These cruel and self-torturing lovers have no illusions, and their "tragic hints" are like a fine, pained mockery of love itself, as they struggle open-eyed against the blindness of passion. The poem laughs while it cries, with a double-mindedness more constant than that of Heine; with, at times, an acuteness of sensation carried to the point of agony at which Othello sweats words like these:

"O thou weed,
 Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet
 That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst
 ne'er been born!"

Mr. Meredith has written nothing more like "Modern Love", and for twenty years after the publication of the volume containing it he published no other volume of verse. In 1883 appeared "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth", in 1887 "Poems and Ballads of Tragic Life"; and, in 1888, "A Reading of Earth", to which "A Reading of Life" is a sort of companion volume. The main part of this work is a kind of nature-poetry unlike any other nature-poetry; but there are several groups which must be distinguished from it. One group contains "Cassandra", from the volume of 1862, "The Nuptials of Attila", "The Song of Theodolinda", "King Harald's Trance", and "Aneurin's Harp", from the volume of 1887. There is something fierce, savage, convulsive, in the passion which informs these poems; a note sounded in our days by no other poet, not even by Leconte de Lisle in the "Poemes Barbares". The words rush rattling on one another, like the clashing of spears or the ring of iron on iron in a day of old-world battle. The lines are javelins, consonanted lines full of force and fury, as if sung or played by a northern skald harping on a field of slain. There is another group of romantic ballads, containing the early "Margaret's Bridal Eve", and the later "Archduchess Anne" and "The Young Princess". There are also the humorous and pathetic studies in "Roadside Philosophers" and the like, in which, forty years ago, Mr. Meredith anticipated, with the dignity of a poet, the vernacular studies of Mr. Kipling and others. And, finally, there is a section containing poems of impassioned meditation, beginning with the lofty and sustained ode to "France, December 1870" and ending with the volcanic volume of "Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History", published last year.

But it is in the poems of nature that Mr. Meredith is most consistent to an attitude, most himself as he would have himself. There is in them an almost pagan sense of the nearness and intimacy of the awful and benignant powers of nature; but this sense, once sufficient

for the making of poetry, is interpenetrated, in this modern poet, by an almost scientific consciousness of the processes of evolution. Earth seen through a brain, not a temperament, it might be defined; and it would be possible to gather a complete philosophy of life from these poems, in which, though "the joy of earth" is sung, it is sung with the wise, collected ecstasy of Melampus, not with the irresponsible ecstasy of the Maenads. It is not what Browning calls "the wild joy of living", but the strenuous joy of living in perfect accordance with nature, with the sanity of animals who have climbed to reason, and are content to be guided by it. It is a philosophy which may well be contrasted with the transcendental theories of a poet with whom Mr. Meredith may otherwise be compared, Emerson. Both, in different ways, have tried to make poetry out of the brain, forgetting that poetry draws nourishment from other soil, and dies in the brain as in a vacuum. Both have taken the abstract, not the concrete, for their province; both have tortured words in the cause of ideas, both have had so much to say that they have had little time left over for singing.

Mr. Meredith has never been a clear writer in verse; "Modern Love" requires reading and re-reading; but at one time he had a somewhat exasperating semblance of lucidity, which still lurks mockingly about his work. A freshman who heard Mallarme lecture at Oxford said when he came away: "I understood every word, but not a single sentence". Mr. Meredith is sometimes equally tantalising. The meaning seems to be there, just beyond one, clearly visible on the other side of some hard transparency through which there is no passage. Have you ever seen a cat pawing at the glass from the other side of a window? It paws and paws, turns its head to the right, turns its head to the left, walks to and fro, sniffing at the corner of every pane, its claws screech on the glass, in a helpless endeavour to get through to what it sees before it; it gives up at last, in an evident bewilderment. That is how one figures the reader of Mr. Meredith's later verse. In the new book there is a poem called "A Garden Idyl"; it is meant to be a simple tale, with the suggestion

of an allegory in it; but all one's wits are needed, with the closest attention, to find out so much as exactly what happened. The first lines which we chanced to read, on opening the book were these:

"Bands of her limpid primitives,
Or patterned in the curious braid,
Are the blest man's".

Turn a few pages, and you will read:

"Or is't the widowed's dream of her new mate?
Seen has she virulent days of heat in flood;
The sly persuader snaky in his blood;
With her the barren Huntress alternate;
His rough refractory off on kicking heels
To rear; the man dragged rearward, shamed, amazed;
And as a torrent stream where cattle grazed,
His tumbled world."

Now it is not merely that Mr. Meredith's meaning is not obvious at a glance, it is, in such passages, ugly in its obscurity, not beautiful. There is not an uglier line in the English language than:

"Or is't the widowed's dream of her new mate."

It is almost impossible to say it at all. Often Mr. Meredith wishes to be too concise, and squeezes his thoughts together like this:

"and the totterer Earth detests,
Love shuns, grim logic screws in grasp, is he."

In his desire to cram a separate sentence into every line, he writes such lines as:

"Look I once back, a broken pinion I."

He thinks differently from other people, and not only more quickly; and his mind works in a kind of double process. Take, for instance, this phrase:

"Ravenous all the line for speed."

An image occurs to him, the image of a runner, who, as we say, "devours" the ground. Thereupon he translates this image into his own dialect, where it becomes intensely vivid if it can be caught in passing; only, to catch it in passing, you must go through two mental processes at once. That is why he cannot be read aloud.

In a poem where every line is on the pattern of the line we have quoted every line has to be unriddled; and no brain works fast enough to

catch/

catch so many separate meanings, and to translate as it goes.

How fine Mr. Meredith can still be when at his best, and how much we lose by losing one of his meanings, may be seen from this sonnet called "At the Close", in which a noble thought is rendered with splendid and reticent dignity:

"To Thee, dear God of Mercy, both appeal,
Who straightway sound the call to arms. Thou know'st;
And that black spot in each embattled host,
Spring of the blood-stream, later wilt reveal.
Now is it red artillery and white steel;
Till on a day will ring the victor's boast,
That 'tis Thy chosen towers uppermost,
Where Thy rejected grovels under heel.
So in all times of man's descent insane
To brute, did strength and craft combining strike,
Even as a God of Armies, his fell blow.
But at the close he entered Thy domain,
Dear God of Mercy, and if lion-like
He tore the fall'n, the Eternal was his Foe."

The thought, in Mr. Meredith's work, is always noble; he is always careful to

"Give to imagination some pure light";

his air is always bracing, when once we have climbed through the clouds which coil about his feet. No writer of our time has been loftier-minded, subtler in intelligence, or more instinctive in feeling. "More brain, O Lord, more brain!" he cries, on behalf of women, in "Modern Love", and it is to the brain that he has always addressed himself, with a consistent disregard of the easier appeal of the emotions.

"Assured of worthiness we do not dread
Competitors",

he has said, proudly conscious that, in spite of some weaknesses and more excesses, he has little to dread from most of the "rivals, tightly belted for the race" whom he has seen straining towards the same goal."

(From The Athenæum: July 20, 1901 pp. 81 - 82.)

"Mr. Meredith has half the making of a great artist in verse. He has harmony without melody; he invents and executes marvellous variations upon verse; he has footed the tight-rope of the galli-ambic measure and the swaying planks of various trochaic experiments;

but/

but his resolve to astonish is stronger than his desire to charm, and he lets technical skill carry him into such excesses of ugliness in verse as technical skill carried Liszt, and sometimes Berlioz, in music. Mr. Meredith has written lines which any poet who ever wrote in English would be proud of; he has also written lines as tuneless as a deal table and as rasping as a file. His ear for the sweep and texture of harmonies, for the building up of rhythmical structure, is not seconded by an ear for the delicacies of sound in words or in tunes. In one of the finest of his poems, the "Hymn to Colour", he can begin one stanza with this ample magnificence:-

"Look now where Colour, the soul's bridegroom, makes
The house of heaven splendid for the bride;"

and can end another stanza thus lumpishly:

"With thee, O fount of the Untimed! to lead,
Drink they of thee, thee eyeing, they unaged
Shall on through brave wars waged."

In the new volume he can flood the eye with splendour and delight the ear with vivid sweetness, as in these lines:-

"Who murmurs hither, hither: who
Where nought is audible so fills the ear?
Where nought is visible can make appear
A veil with eyes that waver through,
Like twilight's pledge of blessed night to come,
Or day most golden? All unseen and dumb,
She breathes, she moves, inviting flees,
Is lost, and leaves the thrilled desire
To clasp and strike a slackened lyre.
Till over smiles of hyacinth seas
Flame in a crystal vessel sails
Beneath a dome of jewelled spray,
For land that drops the rosy day.
On nights of throbbing nightingales."

On another page he sets the teeth on edge by

"Combustibles on hot combustibles
Run piling."

outrages ear and distracts intelligence by

"But your fierce Yes and No of butting heads,
Now rages to outdo a horny past,"

and descends to the trivial and contorted awkwardness of

"Midway the vast round-rayed beard
A desiccated midge appeared;
Whose body pricked the name of meal,
Whose hair had growth in earth's unreal."

Mr. Meredith is not satisfied with English verse as it is; he persists in trying to make it into something wholly different, and these eccentricities come partly from certain theories. He speaks in one place of

"A soft compulsion on terrene
By heavenly,"

which is not English, but a misapplication of the jargon of science. In another place he speaks of

"The posts that named the swallowed mile,"

which is a kind of pedantry. He chooses harsh words by preference, liking unusual or insoluble rhymes, like "Haps" and "yaps", "thick" and "sick", "skin" and "kin", "banks" and "thanks", "skins and "limbs". Two lines from 'The Woods of Westermain', published in 1883 in the 'Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth', sum up in themselves the whole theory:-

"Life, the small self-dragon ramped,
Thrill for service to be stamped."

Here every word is harsh, prickly, hard of sense; the rhymes come like buffets in the face. It is possible that Mr. Meredith has more or less consciously imitated the French practice in the matter of rhymes, for in France rarity of rhyme is sought as eagerly as in England it is avoided. Rhyme in French poetry is an important part of the art of verse; in English poetry, except to some extent at the time of Pope, it has been accepted as a thing rather to be disguised than accentuated. There is something a little barbarous in rhyme itself, with its mnemonic click of emphasis, and the skill of the most skilful English poets has always been shown in the softening of that click, in reducing it to the inarticulate answer of an echo. Mr. Meredith hammers out his rhymes on the anvil on which he has forged his clanging and rigid-jointed words. His verse moves in plate-armour, "terrible as an army with banners".

It is characteristic of Mr. Meredith's method that he writes for the most part in single lines, without enjambement, each line being almost a separate sentence. In his early work - in 'Modern Love' particularly - he broke up his page by an infinity of full stops;

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now he more often uses colons and semicolons, often in the place of mere commas. Take, for instance, this passage in 'The Test of Manhood':-

"In manhood must he find his competence;
In his clear mind the spiritual food:
God being there while he his fight maintains;
Throughout his mind the Master Mind being there,
While he rejects the suicide despair;
Accepts the spur of inexplicable pains;
Obedient to Nature, not her slave:
Her lord, if to her rigid laws he bows:
Her dust, if with his conscience he plays knave,
And bids the Passions on the Pleasures browse:-
Whence Evil in a word unread before;
That mystery to simple springs resolved."

The aim is at emphasis, at detached yet cumulative force, at a kind of vivid monotony; and the same method is used in the fine and interesting experiment in blank verse, 'The Cageing of Ares', especially interesting as being, we believe, the only blank verse which Mr. Meredith has published since the volume of 1851. Here are some lines torn from it, a little roughly, for the passage is too long to quote in full:-

"And when brown corn
Swayed armed ranks with softened cricket song,
With gold necks bent for any zephyr's kiss;
When vine-roots daily down a rubble soil
Drank fire of heaven athirst to swell the grape;
When swelled the grape, and in it held a ray,
Rich issue of the embrace of heaven and earth;
The very eye of passion drowsed by excess,
And yet a burning lion for the spring;
Then in that time of general nourishment,
Sweet breathing balm and flutes by cool woodside,
He the harsh rouser of ire being absent, caged,
Then did good Gaea's children gratefully
Lift hymns to Gods they judged, but praised for peace."

The blank verse suggests rhyme, and has in it something of Marlowe's first attempts to do without rhyme, before he had mastered his great new instrument. It is full of uncouth force, and is not the only experiment which Mr. Meredith has made in his new volume. At the end of the book there are some interesting essays in translation: eight fragments from the 'Iliad' in English hexameters, and some stanzas from the 'Mireis' of Frederi Mistral. If hexameters are to be accepted at all as an English metre, those of Mr. Meredith are certainly among the most successful ever attempted. They have weight and speed, and they rarely suggest effort in the adjustment/

adjustment of syllables. The lines from the Provencal are almost word for word, occasionally, as in the last lines, better than the original; but it is a pity that the first stanza is written in a different metre from the others, which almost exactly copy the curious stanza which Mistral invented for his modern epic.

To Mr. Meredith poetry has come to be a kind of imaginative logic, and almost the whole of his last book is a reasoning in verse. There are a few exceptions, as in this delicate lyric called 'Song in the Songless':-

"They have no song, the sedges cry,
And still they sing.
It is within my breast they sing,
As I pass by.
Within my breast they touch a string,
They wake a sigh.
There is but sound of sedges cry;
In me they sing."

He reasons, not always clearly to the eye, and never satisfyingly to the ear, but with a fiery intelligence which has more passion than most other poets put into frankly emotional verse. He reasons in pictures, every line having its imagery, and he uses pictorial words to express abstract ideas:-

"But not ere he upheld a forehead lamp,
And viewed an army, once the seeming doomed,
All choral in its fruitful garden camp,
The spiritual the palpable illumed."

By such precise imagery does he render his doctrine, sometimes with words of a lusty lusciousness, as here:-

"As peaches that have caught the sun's uprise
And kissed warm gold till noonday, even as vines."

Disdaining the common subjects of poetry, as he disdains common rhyme and common language, he does much by his enormous vitality to give human warmth to arguments concerning humanity. He does much, though he attempts the impossible. His poetry is always what Rossetti called "amusing"; it has, in other words, what Baudelaire called "the supreme literary grace, energy"; but with what relief does not one lay down this 'Reading of Life' and take up the 'Mode Love' of forty years ago, in which life speaks! Mr. Meredith has always been in wholesome revolt against convention, against every deadening limitation of art, but he sometimes carries revolt to the

point of anarchy. In finding new subjects and new forms for verse he is often throwing away the gold and gathering up the ore. In taking for his foundation the stone which the builders rejected he is sometimes only giving a proof of their wisdom in rejecting it."

(From The Monthly Review : pp. 20, 21, October, 1901
(Edited by Henry Newbolt). In section 'Editorial Articles:
On the Line.)

"The poem which forms the principal part of Mr. George Meredith's volume, A Reading of Life (Constable 6s.), and gives its name to the whole, consists of four parts. Two of these - the short introductory verses called "The Vital Choice", and the long poem, "The Test of Manhood", which concludes the series, have already appeared in the pages of this Review and therefore need no further recommendation from us. They form the statement and the solution of the problem of man's life - his march from the wilderness of the beasts and the haunted night to the land of dawn:

"That quiet dawn was Reverence; whereof sprang
Ethereal Beauty in full morning tide.
Another sun had risen to clasp his bride:
It was another earth unto him sang."

Came Reverence from the Huntress on her heights?
From the Persuader came it, in those vales
Whereunto she melodiously invites,
Her troops of eager servitors regales?"

This is the question proposed, and it is here answered; the two intervening parts, "With the Huntress" and "With the Persuader", being no more than consummately beautiful amplifications - descriptive pieces inserted to prolong and heighten the effect, bas-reliefs set round the pedestal of the great work. Keats would have loved them:

"Huntress, arrowy to pursue
In and out of woody glen,
Under cliffs that tear the blue,
Over torrent, over fen,
She and forest, where she skims
Feathery, darken and relume:
Those are her white-lightning limbs
Cleaving loads of leafy gloom."

The second, as befits the subject, is no longer Greek but Italian, painted rather than carved; it glows with the richness and colour/

colour of the Venetian:

" Be sure the ruddy hue is Love's : to woo
Love's Fountain we must mount the ruddy hue.
That is her garden's precept, seen where shines
Her blood-flower, and its unsought neighbour pines.
Daughter of light, the joyful light,
She bids her couples face full East,
Reflecting radiance, even when from her feast
Their outstretched arms brown deserts disunite,
The lion-haunted thickets hold apart. "

Another fine poem, full of leaping flame, - and almost impene-
trable gusts of smoke, - is the dialogue between Patience and Fore-
sight. It adds to the Reading of Life Past a philosophy for life
in the future:

" Ay, be we faithful to ourselves : despise
Nought but the coward in us!
Advantage to the Many : that we name
God's voice : have there the surety in our aim. "

So comes the victory of the chieftain Mind.

" Who never yet of scattered lamps was born
To speed a world, a marching world to warn,
But sunward from the vivid Many springs,
Counts Conquest but a step, and through disaster sings. "

The same eternal antagonism which we find in "A Reading of Life"
is dealt with, it is no dispraise of Mr. Meredith to say, not less
admirably in Mr. T. Sturge Moore's dramatic poem, Aphrodite against
Artemis. "

LAST POEMS

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH.

1909.

Reviews:

- The Daily Chronicle, October 18, 1909, p. 3 by Arthur Waugh.
 The Daily Graphic, October 18, 1909, p. 6 by E.S.G.
 The Daily Mail, October 18, 1909, p. 5.
 The Daily News, October 18, 1909, p. 3 by R. A. Scott-James.
 The Manchester Guardian, October 18, 1909, p. 4 by A.N.M.
 The Standard, October 18, 1909, p. 10.
 The Daily Telegraph, October 19, 1909, p. 13.
 The Globe, October 20, 1909, Literary Supplement, p. 1.
 * The Times Literary Supplement, October 21, 1909, p. 381.
 The Bookseller, October 22, 1909, p. 1520.
 * Country Life, October 23, 1909, p. 572.
 The Nation, October 23, 1909, pp. 163-4 by G. M. Trevelyan.
 The Outlook, October 23, 1909, p. 554.
 The Morning Post, October 25, 1909, p. 2 by E. B.
 The Bystander, October 27, 1909, p. 168.
 The Glasgow Herald, October 28, 1909, p. 11.
 The Northern Whig, October 30, 1909, p. 10.
 * The Bookman, November 1909, p. 94, by Arthur Waugh.
 The Christian World, November 4, 1909, p. 21.
 The Sheffield Daily Telegraph, November 4, 1909, p. 3.
 * The Athenaeum, November 6, 1909, p. 551.
 The Westminster Gazette, November 6, 1909, p. 4.
 The Observer, November 7, 1909, p. 6.
 * The Saturday Review, November 13, 1909, supplement IV - V.
 The Sunday Times, November 14, 1909, p. 5, by F. G. Bettany.
 The Aberdeen Free Press, November 15, 1909, p. 3.
 * The Spectator, November 20, 1909, p. 249.
 The Birmingham Daily Post, December 1, 1909, p. 6.
 The Inquirer, December 4, 1909 pp. 817-8 by C. H. Herford.
 The Star, December 4, 1909, p. 2, by James Douglas.
 * The Literary World, December 15, 1909, p. 387.
 * The Cape Times, February 1, 1910, p. 6.
 * The Forum, New York, April 1910, pp. 441-7 by Richard le Gallienne.
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LAST POEMS:

1909.

(From The Times Literary Supplement, October 21, 1909, p.381. The writer in this eulogistic article, regards Meredith's persistent faith and interest in life as "a moral achievement".)

"In this little book of some sixty pages there is proof of the persistence of genius and faith into the last years of a long life. It is what we should expect; for the faith of Meredith was of a kind not to be shaken either by the changes of the world or by the changes wrought upon him by time; and where faith endures genius is not likely to decay. Indeed, in Meredith genius and faith were almost one, made of the same insight and passion. He expressed his faith with genius and he directed his genius with faith. So this persistence in him of a power to the last seems rather a moral achievement than a piece of physical good fortune; and we are ready to admire these poems as we admire Samson Agonistes or the Ædipus Coloneus, not only for their beauty, but for the will in them that would not submit itself to the torpor of age. Meredith speaks here as he spoke in the fulness of his strength, but with no mechanical repetitions. That old faith of his is still new in him, renewed by the last experience of life, as he tells us himself in verses well called "Youth in Age":-

"Once I was part of the music I heard
On the boughs or sweet between earth and sky,
For joy of the beating of wings on high
My heart shot into the breast of the bird.

I hear it now and I see it fly
And a life in wrinkles agsin is stirred,
My heart shoots into the breast of the bird,
As it will for sheer love till the last long sigh."

We may wonder whether Meredith when he wrote this, or when he gave it its title, remembered Coleridge's poem called "Youth and Age" with its sad desire to make-believe that youth was not gone, since age emptied both of delight and faith seemed intolerable. To Meredith faith persisting still brought delight, and the music did not mock him as if with an empty show of Heaven. He lived still in the future, in spite of all the richness of his past, as we see in one of the

little/

little poems called "Fragments":-

"Open horizons round,
O mounting mind, to scenes unsung,
Wherein shall walk a lusty Time:
Our Earth is young;
Of measure without bound;
Infinite are the heights to climb,
The depths to sound."

In another he seems almost to let us into his own secret of living:-

"This love of nature, that allures to take
Irregularity for harmony,
Of larger scope than our hard measures make,
Cherish it as thy school for when on thee
The ills of life descend."

We must not be too eager, he tells us, to find a symmetry of our own imagining in life; but still must renew our conceptions from experience. It needs courage to do this, that kind of intellectual courage which is rare even in men physically brave. Meredith had it, and it seemed to him the most valuable of all virtues. The courage which he was always praising was never of the brainless kind, even when it was the courage of men of action. Thus he praises Garibaldi in a noble poem in this volume, not merely for his bravery, but for the use he made of it:-

"Now breaking up the crust of temporal strife,
Who reads their acts enshrined in History, sees
That Tyrants were the Revolutionaries,
The Rebels men heart-vowed to hallowed life.

Pure as the Archangel's clearing Darkness thro',
The sword he sees, the keen unwearied sword,
A single blade against a circling horde,
And eye for Freedom and the trampled few."

And in the poem on Trafalgar Day he speaks thus of Nelson's captains:-

"Each trusty captain knew his part:
They served as men, not marshalled kine:
The pulses they of his great heart
With heads to work his main design."

He would have men serve as men, not as marshalled kine, in all the battle of life, disciplined by experience, not cowed by fear.

Meredith was seldom, after his youth, able to surrender himself altogether in his poetry to the delight of pure beauty. Perhaps he was too eager, for a poet, in his inquiries into the significance of beauty. Often he has scarcely sounded a bar of music before he begins to tell us what is the value of music; he starts to justify the poet's rapture before he has given us enough of it to satisfy us.

Yet he kept his passion for beauty to the last, whether in nature or in human beings. He always had a wonderful power of expressing the essential likeness between human and natural beauty; and he never showed it better than in this stanza of his old age:-

"She seemed to make the sunlight stay
And show her in its pride.
O she was fair as a beech in May
With the sun on the yonder side."

It sounds as if a boy had written it in his first love; but in Meredith the first love of beauty lasted all his life, for it, too, was part of his faith; and we must not complain if he expresses faith more often than love, even though love makes better music, for without faith love would never have lasted in him so fresh and strong.

In the first poem of the book, "On Como", he shows a delight as keen as ever in the glory of earth and sky. There has been a flash of thunderless lightning:-

"And the mountains, as from an abyss
For quivering seconds leaped up to attest
That given, received, renewed was the kiss;
The lips to lips and the breast to breast;
All in a glory of ecstasy, swift
As an eagle at prey, and pure as the prayer
Of an infant bidden joined hands uplift
To be guarded through darkness by spirits of air,
Ere setting the sails of sleep till day,
Slowly the loud cloud swung, and far
It panted along its mirrored way."

In the poem "Il y a cent ans", he tells us how through all changes in the life of man the beauty of earth links one generation to another:-

"Meantime give ear to woodland notes around,
Look on our Earth full-breasted to our sun:
So was it when their poets heard the sound,
Beheld the scene: in them our days are one."

In Meredith himself the beauty of earth has certainly linked youth to age; and his days are all one when he sings of it, so that these last poems are as full of life, so close to death, as the first music of "Love in the Valley". "

(From Country Life : October 23rd 1909, p. 572. Under Section : Literature, with the title "Mr. Meredith's Valediction")

"The nineteenth century is remarkable for having produced several men who at the extreme limit of old age retained their intellectual energy. Just before his death the late Mr. W. E. Gladstone wrote an account of his early friend, Arthur Hallam, that is, perhaps, the

most beautiful and poetic piece of literary composition that ever came from his hand. Alfred Tennyson, when an octogenarian, wrote some of his most inspired poems. Mr. Meredith retained to the last his keen interest in life, and, even when his body was utterly broken down, his mind seemed to retain all its original soundness and vigour. This slim, posthumous volume would afford evidence of the fact if any were needed. It contains several pieces that would have done credit to the muse of Mr. Meredith at any time of his life. His character of the wild rose:

"Pride she has none,
Nor shame she knows;
Happy to live "

embodies the very spirit of Meredith, and is as great a tribute to the "princess of weeds" as any in the English language. In a little bundle of Fragments he says of the love of Nature:

"Cherish it as thy school for when on thee
The ills of life descend "

Here he was preaching what he practised all his life. It is good to know that an old man who had arrived at "the land's last limit" was still able to find youth in age:

"Once I was part of the music I heard
On the boughs or sweet between earth and sky,
For joy of the beating of wings on high
My heart shot into the breast of the bird.

I hear it now and I see it fly
And a life in wrinkles again is stirred,
My heart shoots into the breast of the bird,
As it will for sheer love till the last long sigh. "

The originality of description which lent so surprising a charm to the novels we find exemplified in such a verse as this:

"She dwelt where twist low-beaten thorns
Two mill-blades like a snail,
Enormous with enquiring horns,
Looked down on half the vale. "

In his later years Mr. Meredith was keenly alive to the danger that stood in the way of his country, and in a little poem called "Ireland" he gives expression to an aspiration that will be generally echoed:

And/

"And strength to-day is England's need;
To-morrow it may be for both
Salvation : heed the portents, heed
The warnings; free the mind from sloth.

Too long the pair have danced in mud,
With no advance from sun to sun.
Ah, what a bounding course of blood
Has England with an Ireland one! "

We are inclined to think, nevertheless, that the most characteristic piece in the volume, although it is not the best, is the one called "Atkins":

"Yonder's the man with his life in his hand,
Legs on the march for whatever the land,
Or to the slaughter, or to the maiming,
Getting the dole of a dog for pay.
Laurels he clasps in the words "duty done!"
England his heart under every sun:-
Exquisite humour! that gives him a naming
Base to the ear as an ass's bray. "

The Meredithian temperament, the Meredithian indignation, the Meredithian point of view, are all expressed in these eight lines, which sound so like an echo from the pages of his novels."

(From The Bookman, November, 1909 page 94 under the title "The Leader's Legacy" by Arthur Waugh.)

THE LEADER'S LEGACY:

"To keep the heart of youth through the advancing years - that is the true secret of faith and hope. Many great men are denied the consolation, and many small men enjoy it to the full; but when the spirit of youth remains unsullied in a noble and eloquent nature, the possession is one to merit the envy of the gods.

To George Meredith, the last of the great Victorians, the gift was given in no common measure, and his parting legacy to his fellow-countrymen overflows with an abundant faith in the ultimate destiny of man and of his own country.

"Once I was part of the music I heard
On the boughs or sweet between earth and sky,
For joy of the beating of wings on high
My heart shot into the breast of the bird.

I hear it now and I see it fly
And a life in wrinkles again is stirred,
My heart shoots into the breast of the bird,
As it will for sheer love till the last long sigh."

Such is his picture of his own experience, and such is his ideal for

man/

man and woman alike: the heart must beat, and the love of living must glow in the soul, and all things else "will be added unto you".

"She seemed to make the sunlight stay
And show her in its pride.
O she was fair as a beech in May
With the sun on the yonder side.

There was more life than breath can give
In the looks in her fair form;
For little can we say we live
Until the heart is warm."

But, when once the heart is warm and the spirit of youth preserved in the brain of wisdom, then all the world becomes transformed. And this is the dominant note of Meredith's last book; it breathes in every verse a noble confidence in the future of England, and a stirring inspiration to her leaders to quit them like men, and face the perils of the hour with equanimity. There is a great deal of quasi-political verse in the little volume, and, like all poetry which strives to preach a doctrine, it loses some beauty in the cause of emphasis. But whatever may be lost in this way is more than repaid in the splendid enthusiasm which floods the poet's fancy; it is a tremendous stimulus to find an old man, who has seen eighty years of change and vicissitude, so firm in faith and so uplifted in hopefulness.

"Under what spell are we debased
By fears for our inviolate Isle,
Whose record is of dangers faced
And flung to heel with even smile?
Is it a vaster force, a subtler guile?

This Britain slumbering, she is rich;
Lies placid as a cradled child;
At times with an uneasy twitch,
That tells of dreams unduly wild.
Shall she be with a foreign drug defiled?

The grandeur of her deeds recall;
Look on her face so kindly fair:
This Britain! and were she to fall,
Mankind would breathe a harsher air,
The nations miss a light of leading rare."

But it is not enough to fold the hands and wait for the dawn in lassitude; man must go out himself to meet the morning.

"To sit on History in an easy chair,
 Still rivalling the wild hordes by whom 'twas writ!
 Sure, this befits a race of laggard wit,
 Unwarned by those plain letters scrawled on air.
 If more than hands' and armsful be our share,
 Snatch we for substance we see vapours flit.
 Have we not heard derision infinite
 When old men play the youth to chase the snare?
 Let us be belted athletes, matched for foes,
 Or stand aloof, the great Benevolent,
 The Lord of Lands no Robber-birds annex,
 Where Justice holds, the scales with pure intent;
 Armed to support her sword; - lest we compose
 That Chapter for the historic word on Wrecks."

The sword of Nelson must be drawn, if need be, in the cause of honour, but the quarrel must be well-judged, first, so that the wise world approve it. Then, the heart of the children will go with their Mother into the battle.

"Australian, Canadian
 To tone old veins with streams of youth,
 Our trust be on the best in man
 Henceforth, and we shall prove that truth.
 Prove to a world of brows down-bent,
 That in the Britain thus endowed,
 Imperial means beneficent,
 And strength to service vowed."

This, as it seems at least to one reader, is the message of Meredith's last poems. It is a message ripe for its generation. "Raw haste, half-sister to Delay", is rampant alike in literature and politics, and Youth is only too ready (as perhaps it always was) to discount the wisdom of age as antiquated and ineffectual. Well, here was a leader of men who kept the heart of youth for four-score years, and tried it by the touchstone of experience. And his last word was of Hope and Work: his last signal a message of Confidence. It will surely find an echo among all classes of the community. ARTHUR WAUGH."

(From The Athenaeum : November 6, 1909 page 551.
 The anonymous writer of this article values this volume of Meredith's poetry for its "priceless echoes of a memorable past.")

" This slim volume, which presents us with the farewell utterance in verse of George Meredith, will, if only for what it symbolizes, be handled reverently by all to whom our literature is dear. When aged Nestor stepped into the arena, the assembled warriors looked

for/

for no dazzling feat of arms. It was enough that he should rise up, and lay a hand upon the spear or shield. A flood of memories encompassed them; and to rouse such memories was to be invincible. The veteran bore away the prize. Not otherwise is it with our veteran poet. In his last volume we treasure and crown the ever-recurring touches which bring back to us the matchless achievements of his prime.

Poetry, for George Meredith, had always in it something of an athletic strain. He achieved it not so much by rising into the regions of light and fire as by knitting his thoughts together till, from the very strength of concentration in them, fire and light burst forth. Even when beauty is his chief aim, as in the 'Hymn to Colour', he works with the intensive economy of the jewel-cutter: the rhymes are edges, each word, indeed, a facet with individual reflective power. In the sonnets this method is still more conspicuous. They read, so to say, like epitaphs upon their themes. Words that were to be cut in stone are naturally weighted with much meaning; and if there be but a touch of scorn in the delivery, we shall hear the stroke of the hammer at every rhyme. For the achievement of success such a style demands the unfettered activities of a tireless mind. Already, in a volume that has been eight years before the public, there were evidences of an increasing substitution of mere complexity for concentration; it contained passages of high poetry as noble as any that Meredith had conceived, but it lacked sureness of handling. It was clear that a style of which the essence was a stern vital grip was falling back on an habitual tension. In the present volume the tide of poetry has receded further. These verses, taken even with the great name they bear, can offer little to posterity. They are not for those who wish to estimate, but for those who have elsewhere learnt to revere and love, their author. We read them for their priceless echoes of a memorable past.

There is pleasure in lingering over these echoes. At once, upon the opening page, memory vibrates at the word "slipped":

Forth/

"Forth of the low black curtain slipped
Thunderless lightning....."

"About her mouth a placid humour slipped
The dimple..... ;"

the rhyme in each case emphasizing the elusive tenderness of the word.

In 'The Wild Rose' there are strange clashes of reminiscence.

One couplet,

"And swift from the bud she blows
In a day when the wooer is warm,"

recalls the beautiful carolling of 'The Day of the Daughter of Hades'.

In a later stanza,

"For them in some glory of hair
Or nest of the heaving mounds to lie,
Or path of the bride bestrew, "

we are brought back to 'The Empty Purse'.

The metrical echo is, naturally the commonest, and to be heard on almost every page. Here, we had almost said, is a stanza from 'The Thrush in February':-

"And strength to-day is England's need;
To-morrow it may be for both
Salvation: heed the portents, heed
The warnings; free the mind from sloth."

More rarely we are reminded of the deeper poetic qualities, though, needless to say, the noble poetic purpose which we presuppose in work that is Meredith's breathes almost continually. Here, however, is one among other examples, a miracle of economy and suggestiveness:

"She dwelt where twist low-beaten thorns.
Two mill-blades, like a snail
Enormous, with inquiring horns,
Looked down on half the vale. "

We should need to search through a gallery of miniatures to find its parallel; in 'The Orchard and the Heath' alone there are a score; and in a breath it reminds us of them all.

Some echoes, on the other hand, are so clear as to carry their complement with them:-

"Infinite are the heights to climb,
The depths to sound."

Sometimes the chime is in the idea:-

"Look with a core of heart in thought
For so is known the truth beneath "

Sometimes/

Sometimes idea, sound, and other subtler associations are inextricably mingled:-

"Promise they gathered from the rich blood shed...
And strength to service vowed."

The volume, as a whole, is rather a personal than a literary document; and this is a fact which our regard and reverence for the author impel us to emphasize. We regret that it was not in some way made explicit by the editors. An occasional note, added here and there to explain the time or occasion when certain pieces were written, would have brought them before readers with a truer appeal. Again, if matters of textual reading offered difficulty, it was due to the author that his public should be taken into confidence. This is a delicate subject, since all careful readers of Meredith's poetry must be aware that he had no gift for proof-reading. Yet there seems no reason why the trivial defects of a great man should be inherited by his executors or whoever else is responsible for the posthumous publication of his works. The volume contains something like a score of errors in punctuation, some of them so grave as seriously to compromise the sense. Among these comma at the word "day" on p.10, which should be a full stop, and that at the word "Pride" on p.46, which also should be a full stop, are conspicuous; and in the latter case there should be no comma after the word "rock" in the following line. Among misprints we have noticed "has" for "had" on p.25, "know" for "knows" on p.18, "that" for "than" on p.31, and "that" for "what" as the first word of the 'Milton'. Indeed, so great is our sense of insecurity that we are compelled to doubt whether "the loud cloud" (P.10) is not an error for "the low cloud", and whether the sonnet on p.49 should really end with the word "light". That it should be necessary to ask these questions argues a regrettable laxity in the preparation of a volume which we expected to see produced with the most scrupulous care."

(From the Supplement to The Saturday Review, 13 November, 1909. pp. iv and v. The review is anonymous and is entitled "Meredith's Last Poems.")

It was inevitable that these relics of Meredith's poetic work should be gathered up and presented in a volume no long while

after his death. The thing is invariably done, and pardonable enough, human curiosity being what it is. Such gleanings from dead poets' harvests - for the most part occasional or fragmentary pieces - have always a more or less promiscuous air. The experienced reader is forearmed against disappointment. He knows how little he may expect, and thinks himself well rewarded by just a few gleams of the authentic fire. In this volume, to tell the truth, there is more of the real Meredith than we had anticipated. One or two of the poems are highly characteristic and beautiful examples. Among the mere "fragments" will be found several fine things; and even in those pieces which were evidently written to occasion there is often a freshness of imagery and condensed felicity of phrase that nearly, if not quite, touch our very exacting standard of Meredithian art. A man might be totally ignorant of Meredith, yet find enough in this small book to assure him that he was in contact with a writer of the first rank. We are, therefore, far from being sorry, as we fancied we should be, that the volume has been published.

"The Years had worn their Season's Belt" will stand with anything the poet ever wrote. We may call it Meredith's "Lucy Gray":

"She dwelt where twist low-beaten thorns;
Two mill-blades, like a snail,
Enormous, with inquiring horns,
Looked down on half the vale."

The little picture is in Meredith's best vein of happy audacity. As a whole, the poem is most unstudied in effect - Wordsworthian with all the difference of modernity. "On Como" is a typical landscape with cloud-effect and lightning - "thunderless lightning" which appeals so intimately to Meredith and may in some measure serve as a symbol of his mind. Sunset, storm, and the calm after storm are almost the only larger aspects of nature which can draw Meredith's eye away from the more abiding charm of soil-born things with their indigenous brightness and frail beauty. Several times that charm reasserts itself in these poems. None but he could have described "The Wild Rose":

"a plain princess of the weeds,
 As an outcast witless of sin:
 Much disregarded, save by the few
 Who love her, that has not a spot of deceit,
 No promise of sweet beyond sweet,
 Often descending to sour."

And in the "dark hour" when "nought save uses held in the street"
 his remedy is found in "a wilding little stubble flower".

Not least delightful is the note of strength and hope. "Our
 Earth is young", cries the unsoured veteran. He believes in

"scenes unsung
 Wherein shall walk a lusty Time."

Political and patriotic pieces are always a severe strain on poetic
 talent; poetic genius they seldom fit at all. One of the two
 Nelson poems, however - "October 21, 1905" - is Meredith at his
 best, with a restrained strength of rhythm not often found in him.
 Both in verse and prose Meredith was sometimes moved by contemporary
 occurrences to statements or ejaculations of impermanent value,
 and traces of this are naturally not wanting here. A patriot he
 always was, and we find the love of England and a profound sense of
 her history embedded deeply in that instinctive intellectual pride
 which veins - despite the personal modesty of the man - almost
 everything that Meredith wrote. We cannot refrain from giving,
 before we leave this volume, one splendid fragment:

"From labours through the night, outworn,
 Above the hills the front of morn
 We see, whose eyes to heights are raised,
 And the world's wise may deem us crazed.
 While yet her lord lies under seas,
 She takes us as the wind the trees'
 Delighted leafage; all in song
 We mount to her, to her belong."

Nowhere has Meredith's philosophy of life expressed itself more
 aptly or nobly. He is among the very few essentially subtle writers
 from whom nevertheless the dim^{and} dejected moods are alien. His mind
 is only at home in clear light. He belongs to the morning."

(From The Spectator, November 20, 1909 page 849. The
 review appears under the section Books and is entitled
 "Mr. Meredith's Last Poems".)

" These last poems show that the voice of the master kept to the
 end its splendid resonance and his heart its unconquerable youth.

In the sixty pages of this little book there is nothing which repeats his highest poetic achievement. That was, indeed, to be expected, for the strength for great flights was ebbing when he wrote. But the spirit is untouched, and not only the philosophy remains, but much of the melody which fifty years ago seemed to many authentic voice of youth and spring. "Youth and Age" renews the confession of faith of "Love in the Valley":-

"Once I was part of the music I heard
On the boughs or sweet between earth and sky,
For joy of the beating of wings on high
My heart shot into the breast of the bird.

I hear it now and I see it fly
And a life in wrinkles again is stirred,
My heart shoots into the breast of the bird,
As it will for sheer love till the last long sigh."

He could write a lyric, such as "The Years had Worn their Season's Belt", which has all the magic of his earliest work. But, as was natural, in these last days Mr. Meredith's thoughts turned from the personal to the national, and the finest poems are concerned with the state. Nelson has never been celebrated more nobly than in the two magnificent poems, "October 21, 1805", and "Trafalgar Day". In the sonnet "The Warning" with one of his strange yet pregnant metaphors he points the danger of a too vaulting Imperial ambition. In "The Call" he pleads for a people in arms, for the insurance of peace by true national defence. We could wish that its stanzas were imprinted on the heart of every citizen:-

"Our people one! Nor they with strength
Dependent on a single arm;
Alert, and braced the whole land's length,
Rejoicing in their manhood's charm
For friend or foe; to succour, not to harm.

Has ever weakness won esteem?
Or counts it as a prized ally?
They who have read in History deem
It ranks among the slavish fry
Whose claims to live justiciary Fates deny."

"The Voyage of the 'Ophir'" contains one stanza which sums up in final words the meaning of Empire at its highest:-

"Australian, /

"Australian, Canadian,
 To tone old veins with streams of youth,
 Our trust be on the best in man
 Henceforth, and we shall prove that truth,
 Prove to a world of brows down-bent
 That in the Britain thus endowed,
 Imperial means beneficent,
 And strength to service vowed."

(From The Literary World, December 15, 1909 page 387.
 Under the title "George Meredith", the reviewer has dealt
 with "Last Poems", and with two books of criticism on
 Meredith, one by James Moffat, the other by M. B. Forman.)

Last Poems, By George Meredith (Constable 4s. 6d. net.)

George Meredith : A Primer to the Novels. By James Moffat
 Rodder 6s. net.)

George Meredith : Some Early Appreciations. Selected by
 M. B. Forman (Chapman 5s. net)

"This slim volume of Last Poems will be welcomed and treasured
 by all lovers of Meredith and his poetry. That subtle, intimate
 interpretation of Nature that first captivated us is not here very
 strongly represented; but there are several Nature poems of
 characteristic individuality, and among them 'The Wild Rose' is
 quite charming. Evidently, and naturally enough to a seer like
 Meredith, the tendencies of social, national, and international life
 especially stirred his soul in these later years. 'Il y a cent ans'
 is a brief review of the lessons of the past century, and in this
 and some of the following poems Meredith takes the view that

"while men are still
 The three-parts brute which smothers the divine,"

it is fatal for us to fall short of the most alert and complete
 national defence. The finest poems come at the latter half of the
 book; one, on Ireland, is an appeal to England to trust the sister-
 nation, and from another, 'The Call', in which the poet seeks to
 rouse his countrymen to a new virility, we quote the last stanza:

"The grandeur of her deeds recall;
 Look on her face so kindly fair;
 This Britain! and were she to fall,
 Mankind would breathe a harsher air,
 The nations miss a leading rare."

The poems on 'The Crisis' (in Russia), 'The Centenary of Garibaldi',
 and the Milton tercentenary are all notable.

Mr. Moffat's book is excellent. His introduction is a valuable

and/

and discriminating essay, in which Meredith's distinctive qualities as a writer are marshalled with critical insight and judgment, and his defects are clearly and honestly recognised. Summing up, Mr. Moffat rightly pronounces Meredith 'a master of literature', and adds: 'Some of his novels are triumphs of creative prose, and - despite their dependence upon a knowledge of contemporary feeling in nineteenth-century England - they will rank with the supreme contributions of last century to English literature, even although they win him security rather than fulness of fame'. Surely with 'The Egoist' in mind, it is bold to affirm, as Mr. Moffat does, that 'Meredith is no satirist'; and, at least, the affirmation should have been qualified with a reference to his irony. Following his long and full introduction Mr. Moffat gives, in chronological order, admirable summaries and criticisms of the novels. He shows not only that he knows the novels well, but that he has read them with an alert and discerning mind; and, while his comments will be of great service to new students of Meredith, they will also be read with genuine pleasure by the writer's old admirers.

Mr. Forman's book may well be read with the other. He has sagaciously resuscitated and brought together some of the most notable of contemporary critical verdicts upon Meredith between 1861 - when his first book of poems was published - and 1883, when Mark Pattison - of all people in the world! - reviewed for The Academy 'Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth'. This cold-blooded Oxford don was of course, wholly incapable of appreciating the open-air quality of Meredith's poems. Much better were the comments of W. M. Rossetti and Charles Kingsley on the unknown poet of 1861. We get here George Eliot on the two earliest novels, James Thomson on 'Richard Feverel', 'Beauchamp's Career', and 'The Egoist', Swinburne on 'Modern Love', and W. E. Henley on 'The Egoist', not to mention others. It can hardly be said that 'Richard Feverel' met with scant recognition when The Times gave it a review, with long quotations, that fills twenty pages of this book."

(From/

(From The Cape Times : Tuesday, February 1, 1910 page 6)

"MEREDITH'S SWAN SONG".

"George Meredith's novels have now attained a wide popularity, and his place amongst the great masters of English prose is well assured. His poetry has not yet gained so general a suffrage, though discerning critics have always felt that in verse as well as in prose, Meredith found a fitting vehicle for his robust and bracing message. This little volume, which contains Meredith's final poetic contribution, will do much to show to a wider circle of readers that Meredith could write music and meaning in the style of some of our very greatest poets. In these latest poems he seems often to attain a greater lucidity and simplicity than in his earlier verse, while all that was most notable in his former poetic work - his love of Nature, his profound insight into human life, his noble courage, his passion for freedom - have suffered no diminution with the passage of time. As the work of an old man these poems are worthy of comparison with Browning's "Asolando" and Tennyson's "Demeter". These were written by old men, but by old men who carried into old age both the bright freshness of youthful feeling, and the resolved faith of mature years. Tennyson's "Throstle" appeared along with his "Crossing the Bar"; Browning's "A Pearl - A Girl" along with the famous Epilogue, in which he described himself as "one who never turned his back, but marched breast forward." Meredith's "Last Poems" show the same remarkable survival of poetic feeling and faith in the heart of an old man. Browning himself would have been glad to write the poem in this volume entitled "Youth and Age":

"Once I was part of the music I heard
On the boughs, or sweet between earth and sky,
For joy of the beating of wings on high
My heart shot into the breast of the bird.

I hear it now, and I see it fly,
And a life in wrinkles again is stirred,
My heart shoots into the breast of the bird,
As it will for sheer love till the last, long sigh."

And Tennyson need not have scorned to own a piece of imaginative description like the following lines from the poem entitled "The Wild Rose":

"She/

"She is only a plain princess of the weeds,
 As an outcast witless of sin:
 Much disregarded, save by the few
 Who love her, that has not a spot of deceit,
 No promise of sweet beyond sweet,
 Often descending to sour.
 On any fair breast she would die in an hour,
 Praises she scarce could bear,
 Were any wild poet to praise.
 Her aim is to rise into light and air,
 One of the darlings of Earth, no more,
 And little it seems in the dusty ways,
 Unless to the grasses nodding beneath;
 The bird clapping wings to soar,
 The cloud's of an eve's wreath."

Even in the small compass of this book there is room for many an expression of Meredith's distinctive courage and reasoned optimism:

"This love of Nature, that allures to take
 Irregularity for harmony,
 Of larger scope than our hard measures make,
 Cherish it as thy school for when on thee
 The ills of life descend."

or again:

"So do ripe nations into squalor pass,
 When driven as herds by their own private thirst
 They scorn the brain's wild search for virtuous light."

A warning which is even more pointedly expressed in the poem called "Il y a Cent Ans":

"What figures will be shown a century hence?
 What lands intact? We do but know that Power
 From piety divorced, though seen immense,
 Shall sink on envy of the humblest flower."

This, too, is a timely message from "The Voyage of the Ophir", which took the Prince of Wales to inaugurate the Union of Australia:

"Across the globe, from sea to sea,
 The long smoke-pennon trails above
 Writes over sky how wise will be
 The Power that trusts to love -
 A love that springs from heart and brain,
 In union gives for ripest fruit,
 The concord kings and States in vain
 Have sought, who prayed this lofty brute,
 And fondly deeming they possessed,
 On force relied, and found it break:
 That truth once scored on Britain's breast,
 Now keeps her mind awake."

This last quotation leads us to remark on a feature that many will be surprised to find so prominent in this book - its "actuality". Most of the poems have been called for by notable events and celebrations in the past few years - the centenaries of Garibaldi, Nelson and/

and Milton, the Russian Crisis, and the rise of militarism. Poems like these, full of meaning and passion, show how a true poet can worthily enshrine the spirit of the hour, and give utterance to the better elements of a nation's life. The poem called "Ireland" may not be welcome to all politicians, but to lovers of poetry this will make a special appeal as the most striking embodiment yet given to Irish national aspirations. From it we make a few extracts by way of conclusion:

"May she not call herself her own?
That is her cry, and thence her spits
Of fury, thence her graceless tone
At justice given in bits and bits.
The limbs once raw with gnawing chain
Will fret at silken, when God's beams
Of freedom beckon o'er the plains
From mounts that show it more than dreams.

"She, generous, craves your generous dole:
That will not rouse the crack of doom.
It ends the blundering past control,
Simply to give her elbow-room.
Her offspring feel they are a race -
To be a nation is their claim;
Yet stronger bound in your embrace
Than when the tie was but a name.

"A nation she, and formed to charm
With heart for heart and hands all round.
No longer England's broken arm
Would England know where strength is found."

We have quoted enough, we are sure, to convince our readers that this is not a mere gathering of fragments left over by the master as not worthy of publication, but as genuine a contribution to our poetic literature as has been published since the opening of this century."

(From The Forum, New York, April 1910 pp. 441-7 by Richard le Gallienne. This article entitled "George Meredith's Poetry" deals more particularly with the 'Last Poems' of 1909 and the volume of "Poems Written in Early Youth" which was published towards the close of the same year. le Gallienne regards appreciation of Meredith as "a fortunate accident of temperament", and attributes Meredith's lack of a widespread popularity to this restricted appeal.)

"If it be true, as Mark Pattison held, that an appreciation of Milton is the reward of a life-long culture, it is none the less true that the appreciation of Meredith is largely a fortunate accident of temperament. The conservative, traditional, academic type of mind/

mind reads him, when it reads him at all, with impatience, too much resenting his rebellious impressionism to appreciate and enjoy his virile creativeness, his riotous vitality. For such minds writing is still an art of statement, impassioned maybe, but still statement; with Meredith and writers affiliated to him, writing is an art of suggestion, using for its ends all available means and methods, pressing into its service arts "alien to the artist", and perhaps more and more employing the methods of music and painting. Meredith's writing is essentially modern, the product of an age that produced Wagner. Carlyle and Browning were, of course, the first exponents of the style, and Meredith learned much from both of them. All three stand together as the innovators of a form of expression, almost journalistic in its determination to flash the immediate effect, and Shakespearean in the audacity of its metaphoric method - a method designed to reveal and to embody the last intimacy of insight and sensation. Of course, all three are innovating artists, because they are first innovating thinkers, and their subject-matter no less than their manner is disturbing to minds that feel - and possibly with justice - that art is not concerned with new thinking, but with the ancient verities, and indeed loses its immortal beauty and infinite serenity when it gives ear to those spiritual and intellectual "storms that rage outside its happy ground". Thought is said to be destructive of beauty, disastrous to fair faces, and there are those who would seem to feel that art is unnaturally employed in the expression of spiritual struggle, or sensual turmoil. Art, they would seem to say, should be static, not dynamic. Poetry for such is the expression of traditional themes in the traditional poetic manner - and they are by no means all wrong.

For as one grows older - and to grow older is proverbially to grow more conservative - one comes better to understand the academic distaste for writers of the Carlyle - Browning - Meredith school, and grows more to insist that writing shall be writing - not talking, however brilliant, not fantastic flash-lighting of one's theme, no merely pyrotechnic hints of one's meaning, or musical adumbrations,

or the presentation of a verbal palette, however chromatic and bizarre, for a picture. We crave "the little word big with eternity", the one inevitable metaphor, the word worthy of eternal marble, the image as immediate and universal as lightning or the cry of a child; not the innumerable tentative word, however vivid or strange, nor the play of clustering imagery, however, Protean or merely harlequinesque.

And the more we demand this expressive finality and universality of literature, the more we realise that these three writers I have classed together are inspired prophetic journalists, moulders of the spiritual aspiration of their time, rather than enduring voices of the eternal meanings.

It is exceedingly improbable that any one of them will be read, or even understood, a hundred years from now; for they write, so to speak, in the spiritual slang of the day. They have all worked, for the most part, in the perishable medium of contemporary utterance, and on, of course, a far higher plane, must suffer a similar disintegration to that which must inevitably overtake the clay masterpieces of Mr. Kipling.

But the prophet must always, of necessity, be somewhat of a journalist, and the fact of his utterance being more adapted for its immediate purpose than for permanent inspiration, is not to say that the divine fire is not in him, or that he is not a chosen vessel of vast service to his day and generation. It is quite possible to be a great writer, without appealing to posterity, and such writers as I am speaking of will probably reach posterity rather as spiritual influences in the blood of Time than as names upon his lips or living voices in his ears.

So much in concession to the conservative, classic, point of view; yet happy is the man whose enjoyment of *Paradise Lost* does not preclude from appreciation of *Leaves of Grass*, or whom Wordsworth - with his somewhat anthropomorphic worship of nature - has not disqualified for understanding of Meredith's sterner "reading of earth".

Whether or not there are ears to hear Meredith in the future

will depend upon his style, upon the durability of his verbal method; it is to be hoped for the sake of our great-great-grandchildren that they may be able to decipher that "Meredithese", which, though difficult even to us, has a certain thrill of contemporary intimacy that enables us to guess at the spiritual meaning when the writing itself is somewhat verbally dark; for the spiritual and intellectual content of Meredith's writing is of that eternal importance which concerns men in all ages. Man will be as much in need of a practical faith in the invisible powers and the divine significance of the human struggle a thousand years hence as to-day; and, for that reason, it is to be hoped that Meredith's message may still survive, though it will surely need the aid of a glossary. Yet, as we still read Chaucer for pleasure, maybe men a thousand years hence will still painfully translate Meredith for the good of their souls.

Man has many ways of attaining faith. The ways vary with his temperament. But the way most convincing to the modern- or present-day-mind is the way of the fact. Not faith founded on fiction, but faith founded on fact. Such faith it is that Meredith brings us. The strength of his philosophy lies in his facing all the facts, ugly and beautiful, stern and gentle. Perhaps it is a Manichean world - but Meredith never doubts that God has the best of it. The devil is merely a part of the process. In proof of this, what more do you need than - a rose!

" And O, green bounteous Earth!
 Bacchante Mother! Stern to those
 Who live not in thy heart of mirth;
 Death shall I shrink from, loving thee?
Into the breast that gives the rose,
Shall I with shuddering fall? "

A rose - or an automobile. Both would serve alike to Meredith as evidences of the divine energy ever feeding with celestial fire this mysterious activity we call life.

His novels are lit with this invincible faith in "the upper glories", in spite of their dealing so constantly with sophisticated social types and conditions; even though them Meredith was able to

find/

find "the developments and the eternal meanings".

Meredith was a comedian, a social satirist, as well as a spiritual teacher and a poet. It is, indeed, because he was so much a man of this world that we pay such attentive heed to what he has to say about the next. He loves to take life in apparently its most artificial, most unreal developments, to demonstrate for us that, however sublunary or exiled from "the healthy breath of morn" it may seem, it is none the less fed by the great forces, and still a thing of magic and mysterious destiny.

This radiant faith, diffused in his novels, is to be found concentrated - perhaps too much concentrated - in Meredith's poetry. There are those who think that Meredith expressed himself most lastingly in his verse; and there are others who cannot read his verse at all. The positive side of an argument is usually that best worth listening to. When we find that a new and strange light, so inspiringly visible to us, is nothing but Egyptian darkness to others - we can but mercifully conclude that those others are blind. Meredith's verse, in its later developments particularly, is hard reading, strangely, perhaps wilfully, crabbed and cryptic; but it is no more so than Brownings, and the message it holds for us within its rough and prickly husk is better worth finding. His verse has a distinction that Browning's seldom attained, and both poets are curiously alike in their alternation between lyric simplicity and sibylline mystery or mystification.

The two volumes of Meredith's verse, recently published by Messrs. Scribners, which are the occasion of these remarks,¹ bring together the two extremes of Meredith's poetic achievement, in a striking contrast of method, but an equally striking harmony of spiritual attitude. The Meredith of the Last Poems, and the Meredith of the Poems Written in Early Youth are one and the same, the septuagenarian and the boy of twenty-three, in their jubilant affirmation of the joyous significance of life; though of the two we cannot but feel that it is the boy who is the better poet.

Take this fragment from the Last Poems:

¹ Poems Written in Early Youth and Last Poems. By George Meredith
New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910

" This love of nature that allures to take
Irregularity for harmony,
Of larger scope than our hard measures make,
Cherish it as thy school for when on thee
The ills of life descend."

Here the old man is still of the same mind with the boy, but the boy said it better when he sang of Nature as "our only visible friend - " when he wrote in his remarkable poem "The Spirit of Earth in Autumn" -

"Great Mother Nature! teach me, like thee,
To kiss the season and shun regrets.
And am I more than the mother who bore,
Mock me not with thy harmony!
Teach me to blot regrets,
Great Mother! me inspire
With faith that forward sets
But feeds the living fire.

Faith that never frets
For vagueness in the form.
In life, O keep me warm!
For what is human grief?
And what do men desire?
Teach me to feel myself the tree,
And not the withered leaf.
Fixed am I and await the dark to be."

The beauty of "Love in the Valley" needs no further praise. It is one of the most perfect poems in the English tongue. There are some of us who would not exchange it for Keats.

Also, in his early (1851) poems Meredith sang with a simplicity curiously contrasted with his later manner. That young book is full of ballads and lyrics, full of swing and bloom that would surprise those who have only read *The Egoist* or *Diana of the Crossways*. Take his ballad of "Beauty Rohtraut", for example:

BEAUTY ROHTRAUT.
(From Moricke).

"What is the name of King Ringang's daughter?
Rohtraut, Beauty Rohtraut!
And what does she do the livelong day,
Since she dare not knit and spin alway?
O hunting and fishing is ever her play!
And heigh! that her huntsman I might be!
I'd hunt and fish right merrily!
Be silent, heart!

And it chanced that, after this some time,
Rohtraut, Beauty Rohtraut,
The boy in the Castle has gained access,
And a horse he has got and a huntsman's dress,
To hunt and to fish with the merry Princess;
And O! that a king's son I might be!
Beauty Rohtraut I love so tenderly.
Hush! hush! my heart.

Then/

Then slowly and silently they rode home, -
 Rohtraut, Beauty Rohtraut!
 The boy was lost in his delight:
 "And, wert thou Empress this very night
 I would not heed or feel the blight;
 Ye thousand leaves of the wild wood wist
 How Beauty Rohtraut's mouth I kiss'd.
 Hush! hush! wild heart."

Or this bitter song which includes in its singing somewhat of that
 later sorrow which probably made Modern Love:

SONG.

"Fair and false! No dawn will greet
 Thy waking beauty as of old;
 The little flower beneath thy feet
 Is alien to thy smile so cold;
 The merry bird flown up to meet
 Young morning from his nest i' the wheat,
 Scatters his joy to wood and wold,
 But scorns the arrogance of gold.

False and fair! I scarce know why,
 But standing in the bely air,
 And underneath the blessed sky,
 I plead for thee in my despair; -
 For thee cut off, both heart and eye
 From living truth; thy spring quite dry;
 For thee, that heaven my thought may share,
 Forget - how false! and think - how fair!"

Yet even one's final thought of Modern Love, poignant and
 dramatic as its human tragedy is, is not of the individuals - it is:

"We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,
 And in the osier-isle we heard their noise"

that sonnet superbly praised by Swinburne as only he could praise.

Meredith, remarkable and fascinating personality as, of course
 he was, never seemed to have any individual history. If ever
 Nature, in the phrase of Matthew Arnold, took the pen and wrote, the
 hand was not Wordsworth's, the hand was George Meredith's. Wordsworth
 was a Puritan with a great literary gift, moralizing upon Nature.
 Meredith was a pagan - in the best sense of the word, understanding
 her, one of her children. He was as his own Melampus, who:

"With love exceeding a simple love of the things
 That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck;
 Or change their perch on a beat of quiver wings
 From branch to branch, only restful to pipe and peck;
 Or, bristled, curl at a touch their snouts in a ball;
 Or cast their web between bramble and thorny hook;
 The good physician Melampus, loving them all,
 Among them walked, as a scholar who reads a book."

Wordsworth never wrote:

"Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
 Wary in the dusk lit by one large star,"

and/

and he never wrote anything more filled with the magic of the Nature he loved. But comparisons are proverbial. Wordsworth loved Nature like a preacher. Meredith loved her like a man - or perhaps, I should say, like the Great God Pan - of whom, I am inclined to think, he was an incarnation. There is the significance of his poetry."

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

POEMS WRITTEN IN EARLY YOUTH;
 POEMS FROM 'MODERN LOVE' (First Edition);
 AND SCATTERED POEMS.

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH.

1910.

Reviews:

- The Daily Mail, January 22, 1910, p. 10, by M.
- The Daily News, January 25, 1910, p. 3, by R. Scott-James.
- The Daily Chronicle, January 26, 1910, p. 3, by Arthur Waugh.
- The Manchester Guardian, February 2, 1910, p. 5, by B. S.
- The Glasgow Herald, February 3, 1910, p. 6.
- The Daily Telegraph, February 4, 1910, p. 14.
- The Western Daily Press, February 5, 1910, p. 9.
- The Westminster Gazette, February 7, 1910, p. 3.
- *The Nation, February 19, 1910, pp. 814-5.
- The Globe, February 23, 1910, p. 4.
- *Truth, February 23, 1910, p. 458 by Desmond B. O'Brien.
- *The Times Literary Supplement, February 24, 1910, p. 63.
- *The Bookman, March 1910, pp. 274-5 by M. Sturge Henderson.
- *The Athenaeum, March 5, 1910, pp. 270-1.
- March 18, 1910, p. 341, letter from W. M. Meredith.
- *The Saturday Review, March 12, 1910, pp. 334-5.
- The Illustrated London News, April 16, 1910, p. 566.
- The Forum, New York, April 1910, pp. 441-7 by Richard le Gallienne.

POEMS WRITTEN IN EARLY YOUTH.

1909.

(From The Nation : February 19, 1910 pages 814-5. This review is entitled 'A Poet's Spring', and the critic expresses wonder that from 'this not very considerable spring', the power and splendour of Meredith's mature poetry was to develop.)

"Confronted with such a book as this, criticism must take care to remember the cardinal doctrine that we are not to let associations or circumstances weigh in our judgments of poetry. George Meredith during his life suppressed a great many of his early poems; and here, in accordance, with one of our doubtful modern literary customs, they are exhumed. In regard to such a book, the question for criticism is simply this : Is the world of poetry the richer for the revival of these suppressed poems of Meredith's? And to that question the greatness which Meredith afterwards achieved is no more pertinent than Blake's insanity and Chatterton's youth are to criticism of their works. Poets do not always suppress wisely; and when they are unwise in suppression, there is not the smallest reason why their whims should deprive mankind of beautiful words. But, as the present volume shows, Meredith was eminently wise in his suppression, as far, at least, as his poetry was concerned. There is no harm, and there is a good deal of interest, in a temporary revival of the poems he consigned to oblivion; but if all the things here resurrected, these "Poems Written in Early Youth", and the poems excised from the first edition of the "Modern Love" volume, are to be included in the authoritative complete edition of his poetical works, the matter is more serious. The "Poems of George Meredith", as they now stand, along with those fruits of his latest years, are, beside their wonderful intrinsic qualities, so notable among the complete works of modern poets for the entire absence of all but poetic metal of the highest temper, that to dull such collected purity of excellence by inserting work of softer substance, of cruder forging, would be deplorable. Those admirers of Meredith who are more vehement than discriminating will no doubt combat the view that all his published writing should not be preserved; whatever a master of such greatness has given to the world, the world, they say, should reverently/

reverently retain, as, if not in itself notable, then at least of interest to scholarship or criticism. The notion is but a fetish of our day. Meredith did for himself what somebody should have done for Wordsworth, and there is no reason for undoing it. Songs in which a poet's imagination is either immature or flagging may be interesting to the curious bookman; the poet's business, however, is not with him; but with the man to whom poetry is a vital and adventurous matter; and he requires either good poetry or nothing. It may please some of us to possess the offspring which Meredith had exposed and fondly hoped had perished. But if the whole of these revived poems are included in future complete editions, posterity a few years hence is pretty certain to regard them as troublesome encumbrances. No doubt the copyright editions are safe enough from the intrusion; but the worst of issuing such a volume as this is that it gives an opportunity to some enterprising publisher of the future for bringing out a "complete" edition of Meredith's poems, bearing on the title-page the proud legend, "Including all the suppressed poems".

Let us not, however, be thought wholly ungrateful for the publication of these early, suppressed, and scattered poems. Having pointed out the danger, we may enjoy the advantages. Though no bad poem, whoever was its author, deserves preservation, yet the preservation of a few good poems is worth the risk of encumbering future editions with mediocrity. And though the bulk of this book's contents does not in the least illustrate Meredith's name - much of it, indeed, hardly exhibiting the promise of what was to come after - there are in it several poems which might be bound up with "Modern Love", and the "Ballads of Tragic Life". For the rescue of these it would ill become any true lover of poetry to be anything but deeply grateful. There is, for instance, spacious poetry in the "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn", which is, of course, fairly well known. The admirable opening lines

"Fair Mother Earth lay on her back last night,
To gaze her fill on Autumn's sunset skies" -

promise a large music, which is sustained right to the last stanza, with its superb simile of the dying redskin chieftain. "The Head

of/

of Bran the Blest", which Henley included in his "Lyra Heroica", is a vigorous piece of work, not unworthy of the man who made the song of "Aneurin's Harp", as a poem based on Celtic story. There is an heroic dogmatism in the first verse:-

"When the Head of Bran
Was firm on British shoulders,
God made a man!
Cried all beholders";

And the rest of it goes to the same warlike tune. The wild whirling imagery of "Phantasy", an absurdly successful rendering in neat verses of an outrageous mad dream - the very spirit of sleeping indigestion - is, for sheer cleverness, a remarkable piece of work, certainly not unworthy of permanence. "The Beggar's Soliloquy" might find a place next to "Juggling Jerry", though it is pale beside that noble poem. "South-West Wind in the Woodland" has the importance of being the first recognisable note of Meredith's magnificent nature-song, and, though far from mature, there is writing in it that may earn it a place in any collection of his works. Especially notable is the way the poetry conveys the gradual growth of noise, from the time when the aspens had first felt the approaching breeze, the prelude to the gale and

" Had caught his earliest windward thought
And told it trembling";

to the time when the full force of hurricane leaps on the wood,

"And ash and oak and oakling rave
And shriek, and shout, and whirl, and toss,
And stretch their arms and split and crack,
And bend their stems and bow their heads,
And grind, and groan, and lion-like
Roar to the echo-peopled hills".

There is sound workmanship and observation in the "Pastorals", but hardly enough distinction to make them worth preserving; and there are one or two lyrics that might be kept in the light. The few "Scattered Poems", though not extraordinarily remarkable, would not be altogether out of place in a complete edition. But, with the exception of the poems we have named, if oblivion overtakes the rest of those which Meredith disowned, it will not be "the iniquity of oblivion". Charles Kingsley perceived great promise in the early poems, and it is much to his credit that he should have done so, and

especially that he should have proclaimed it. For, now that we possess Meredith's full achievement, we cannot but wonder at the slender evidence Kingsley had to work on. Save for the fact that not much influence is traceable, these early poems are not even, as we who look back on them from "The Sage Enamored" and the rest might expect, particularly individual. For the most part, they hardly get beyond pretty fancies and pretty phrases. There might certainly be possibilities latent in a young poet who could invent a conceit like this:-

"O Winter! I'd live that life of thine,
With a frosty brow and an icicle tongue,
And never a song my whole life long -
Were such delicious burial mine!
To die and be buried and so remain
A wandering brook in April's train."

And such a thought as this is memorable:-

"Night like a dying mother,
Eyes her young offspring, Day."

But these are only brief moments. Young men have done such things before, and never come to great maturity. The juvenile love-poems, curiously shy and awkward, the experiments in classic legend, the attempt at an epic manner (with a hint of Tennyson) in "Idomeneus", at a ballad manner (with a hint of Rossetti) in "Margaret's Bridal Eve", - these, if narrowly searched, may betray promise of the Meredith whom all the world knows. But we know what to look for; and it was a bold, and as it turned out, an excellent feat in criticism, to prophesy the coming greatness from these beginnings. Look, for instance, at the weak early version of "Love in the Valley"; we, with the later version, one of the most beautiful poems in the language, in our ears, read it with the full knowledge of what the embryo came to. But anyone who saw it for the first time in a newly published book might very excusably reckon it simply as a good enough poem for a young man. On the whole, the main feeling caused by this book is wondering gratitude that out of this not very considerable spring should have grown that superb mastery of storm and splendor which we call the poetic genius of George Meredith."

ANONYMOUS.

(From Truth : February 23, 1910, page 458. This short extract appeared in an article entitled "Books" by Desmond B. O'Brien)

"..... There seems to me incomparably more poetry than music in George Meredith's "Poems Written in Early Youth". (3)
To my ear at least they bump along like a motor with punctured tyres; but it is more than possible that my ear is at fault. Of the stuff of poetry, however, the volume is packed with a pregnancy which is sometimes even obscure in its condensation....."

(From The Times Literary Supplement : Thursday, February 24, 1910 page 63. The article is entitled "Meredith's Early Poetry"; the reviewer found the volume "interesting" and was struck by the evidence even in these early poems of that conflict between mind and emotion which mars much of Meredith's later work.)

"The contents of this volume will for the most part be new even to the most enthusiastic admirers of Meredith's Poetry. It includes the whole of his first book, published when he was twenty-three, in 1851, with a quotation from Horne's "Orion" on its title-page and dedicated "with profound admiration and affectionate respect" to his father-in-law, Thomas Love Peacock. This is followed by the greater but less familiar part of the volume entitled "Modern Love", and by fourteen pieces contributed to various periodicals between 1851 and 1890. The poems are interesting, then, not only as a revelation of first tendencies and ideals, and unpractised accomplishments, but also of Meredith's mature judgment and critical taste with regard to his own work, since apparently none of these poems was deemed worthy of inclusion in his later volumes.

Precocious singularity in a poet not infrequently ends in protracted self-imitation. But with Meredith, although there is curious evidence in these youthful verses of certain drifts of thought and feeling, and peculiarities of manner, it is clear that his real originality grew upon him until it amounted to little else than perversiveness. Not for him, as for so many artists, that long and difficult journey from complexity to simplicity. Close and eager observation of and insight into nature are here; a delight in wild

(3) "Poems Written in Early Youth", "Poems from Modern Love" and "Scattered Poems", By George Meredith. (London : Constable & Co. 6s. net.)

and open and wooded spaces, in skylark and nightingale, in star and south-west wind and streaming storm-tossed trees; and that live-long joy in beauty of form, in youth and energy and courage, pursuit and tamelessness. Here and there, too - but by comparison how very rarely - the reader is caught back by those vivid and congested phrases, that intoxicated eloquence that is heightened and poetical, but still in effect little else than prose; by that splendid and perplexing welter of metaphor and imagery; and also by what became at last an habitual impetuosity of expression which so often leaves, together with the delight of its vivid originality, an impatience of its roughness behind it. Throughout his life Meredith was in conflict not only with the world without, but with the world within. We catch many a glimpse even here of the alert and confident mind that refused to sweeten or disguise unpalatable truths, was so often at daggers drawn with a sensitive and perhaps even sentimental heart, and found so ready a weapon in a caustic and full-bodied humour and matchless wit to pierce through pretence and niceness, leaving beauty to win its way as best it could. All these rare things in poetry are here in bud, awaiting time's unsealing. On the other hand, that clear and tranquil presentation of thought and emotion, lifting into a less changing world the things of earth and experience, which in other poets is usually the ideal on which their hope is set, is far more evident in these rather crude and boyish verses than in much of Meredith's later work. Not often in the poetry most characteristically Meredithian do we meet with the simplicity of such lines as these on the snowdrop, that

"..... ever in a placid, pure repose,
More like a spirit with its look serene,
Droops its pale cheek reined thro' with infant green."

Never too often does he haunt the memory with the restrained and tender feeling of such lines as -

"False and fair! I scarce know why,
But standing in the lonely air,
And underneath the blessed sky,
I plead for thee in my despair; -
For thee cut off, both heart and eye
From living truth; thy spring quite dry;
For thee, that heaven my thought may share,
Forget - how false! and think - how fair!"

Was it in part wilful petulance, in part even indolence, that left so much of his work in a state that suggests to the strenuous reader a very free and yet congested translation from one language into another, with neither of which the translator seems quite at his ease? Mere inorganic difficulty of construction is never evidence of profundity of thought or of complexity of feeling. Of the poetry that has survived its age, how very small a part is else than pure and clear in expression. Even in Donne it is the fire, not the smoke that shines. And it is because there is so little trace, and yet a distinct trace, of conflict and perplexity in these forgotten poems that such a threadbare and tiresome question recurs to the mind. We are almost tempted to think that Meredith himself in a whimsical mood set about the task of deliberately parodying his own mannerisms in the following lines from a poem entitled "To Children : for Tyrants", which was published for the first time in 1887:-

"Strike not thy dog with a stick!
I did it yesterday:
Not to undo though I gained
The Paradise : heavy it rained
On Kobold's flanks, and he lay.

Little Bruno, our long-ear pup,
From his hunt had come back at my heel.
I heard a sharp worrying sound,
And Bruno foamed on the ground,
With Koby as making a meal.

I did what I could not undo
Were the gates of the Paradise shut
Behind me : I deemed it was just.
I left Koby crouched in the dust,
Some yards from the woodman's hut

In a young writer want of craft usually betokens want of thought or of energy. We see this plainly in such lines as --

"His minstrelsy may be unchaste -
'Tis much unto that motley taste,
And loud the laughter he provokes
From those sad slaves of obscene jokes."

Crudeness such as this is what every poet has to learn to reject or refashion. It is the moment of inspiration when the thought flashes into being, its form its very self, that reveals the poet and divides his work from that which is merely the elaborated outcome of good intention or taste. And no reader with any insight could have easily failed to discover numberless lines and passages of

abundant/

abundant promise in these first efforts after self-expression, such for instance, as -

"Each perfect in its place; and each content
With that perfection which its being meant"

or,

"Heed not their despair! -
Thou art thy future, not thy past."

and whole poems, too, of complete achievement, such as "Daphne", "South-West Wind in the Woodland", and "The Sleeping City" - the last not the only poem in this book made almost unintelligible by extremely capricious punctuation. Only eleven years, but eleven years devoted to the writing of many novels, including "Richard Feverel", separate the poems of this first volume from the maturity and complexity of "Modern Love".

But by far the most interesting thing in this interesting volume is the inclusion among the poems of 1851 of what must be a very early version of "Love in the Valley". The finished, rewritten poem was first published in Macmillan's Magazine in 1878. A note at the end of "Poems and Lyrics", 1883, informs the reader that "a sketch of this poem appeared in a volume published many years back, now extinct". According to Mr. le Gallienne's bibliography of Meredith's works, however, this "sketch" was not included in the 1851 volume. And for reasons unexplained the book now under review has been published, except for the bare date and its sub-title, without notes or introduction of any kind to enlighten the reader as to its source or the history of its contents. "Love in the Valley", as it stands here, consists of only eleven stanzas, four of which appear to have been entirely omitted, while others contain only a few lines, or less, of those substituted for them, in the completed poem. The difference in outlook, judgment, and mastery between the two versions is extraordinary. The first is boyish, rather hard, very practical, and, though still unmistakably Meredith, even a little early-Victorian in such a verse as -

Comes/

Comes a sudden question - should a strange hand pluck her!
 Oh! what an anguish smites me at the thought.
 Should some idle lordling bribe her mind with jewels! -
 Can such beauty ever thus be bought?
 Sometimes the huntsmen prancing down the valley
 Eye the village lasses, full of sprightly mirth;
 They see as I see, mine is the fairest!
 Would she were older and could read my worth!

But without a line by line comparison it is impossible to show the richness and delicacy and imagination that have made of verse neither very original nor striking perhaps the most beautiful, certainly the most finished and best-loved, of all Meredith's poems. It may not be over-fanciful to suppose that the love scene between Richard and Lucy, in the moonlight and stillness, with the churring of the night-jar, in the shadow of the woods, may have been the dramatization of some actual episode recorded in this first transcript, with just that one thread, "Clattering one note like a brown eve-jar", on which to weave what is one of the most delightful of the verses in the poem as it stands now, in memory:-

Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
 Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.
 Lone on the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,
 Brooding o'er the gloom, spins the brown eve-jar.
 Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting.
 So were it with me if forgetting could be willed.
 Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling well-spring -
 Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled."

ANONYMOUS.

(From The Bookman : March, 1910. pp. 274-275. This review entitled "Meredith's Poems" was written by May Sturge Henderson, who in 1907 published her book "George Meredith, Novelist Poet Reformer". In this article, as in her book, she regards Meredith as primarily a great moralist and teacher who only intermittently becomes a great artist in verse.)

"It is only just that any discussion of this volume should be prefaced by the reminder that Meredith himself, in his life-time, dismissed the whole of its contents as unworthy of republication. And, even without fully endorsing that view, we do well to remember the identity of the poet who made that decision with the critic who, in The Fortnightly of 1842, wrote:

"A large and noble theme has a frame-work that yields as much support as it demands. Lyrics yield none; and when they are not spontaneous they rob us of a great deal of our strength and sincerity. If they are true things, coming of a man's soul, they are so much taken from him;

if they reverse they hurry him. There should be no such thing as the habit of lyrical composition It is from observation and meditation that poetry gets sinew and substance, and the practice of observing and meditating soon tames in poets the disposition to pour out verses profusely."

Now, though there were not a great many verses in the volume of 1851 ("Poems Written in Early Youth" consists of three sections - "Poems of 1851", "Poems from Modern Love of 1862", and "Scattered Poems", reprinted from magazines), what there are are of a kind which inevitably suggest as their background a vast experimental output consigned to the flames. And this, not because what is elected for publication is rare and consummate, but because so very largely it is experimental and derivative. Both Kingsley and Rossetti in their reviews at the time spoke of the young author as under the influence of Keats, though this particular connection does not seem to amount to much more than Meredith's adoption of faulty expressions like "bloomy" and "seemingness". But the volume has stanzas and poems that are almost pure Wordsworth; the observer of nature in "The South-West Wind in the Woodland" is promised:

"More knowledge of her secret, more
Delight in her beneficence,
Than hours of musing, or the lore
That lives with men could ever give,"

and such songs as "When I would Image" are transcriptions of Heine. Byron and Shelley are present too and, inevitably, Goethe. But perhaps most interesting of all is the Blake in the "Pastorals", and particularly in "London by Lamplight" - its cadences as well as its images and its theme:-

"But woe is many a passer-by
Who as he goes turns half an eye,
To see the human form divine
Thus Circe-wise changed into swine!

.....

The stygian darkness reigns within,
The river of death from the founts of sin,
And one prophetic water rolls
Its gas-lit surface for their souls."

The close interweaving of Meredith's novels and poems has never yet been tracked as it should. Can there be doubt that "Love in the Valley" - this shorter and, to my mind, much more spontaneous and

lyrical/

lyrical version - was written by Richard for Lucy? and, though the writer of it was but twenty-three, his attitude in "London by Lamplight" is already that of the creator of Dahlia and Nests.

The "Pastorals", with which was included the original eleven-stanzaed version of "Love in the Valley" already referred to, are far the most notable portion of the "Poems of 1851", these are what Charles Kingsley pronounced them, "Honest landscape painting.... have the living seed of poetry, certain to grow and develop." But it should fairly be acknowledged that amongst the poems of this earliest volume are some astonishing productions, and perhaps the most astonishing of all is "The Two Blackbirds", which it is really difficult not to think of as written by an older Meredith turning on and parodying his own ideas! The tale is of a caged black-bird daily fed and consoled by a free one whose mate has been shot. The two blackbirds' sympathy in suffering and the devotion of the uncaged bird are dilated on, and then we are given:

"And shall I say, till weak with age,
Down from its crowy branch it drops,
It will not leave that captive cage,
Nor cease its busy searching hops?

"Ah no! the moral will not strain;
Another sense will make it range,
Another mate will soothe its pain
Another season work a change.

"But through the live-long summer, tried,
A pure devotion we may see;
The ebb and flow of Nature's tide;
A self-forgetful sympathy."

For the lover of Meredith this pre-natal conception of the "stern exact" substituting itself for the pseudo-poetic may have a certain historical value; to introduce it to the world at large is to court ribaldry. "And shall I say" reads like an anticipation of Lewis Carroll!

Of the "Poems of 1862" our first and last impression is astonishment that a volume which contained "Modern Love" and the "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn" could have included "Grandfather Bridgeman" and "The Doe". So great and so high is the poetry of certain passages of "The Ode" that we necessarily cavil at its author's decision not to reprint it, till we realise the grounds of

that decision. In this, as in everything else in his maturer years, Meredith is primarily a moralist. All the splendours of the poem failed in their appeal against his dismissal of what he felt inadequate in its expression of the central conviction of his life. For this reason we choose to extract a descriptive, and not the often-quoted philosophical passage. Before a night of wild storm and revel in the forest the wind is sounding its notes in various trees:

"Here stood a solitary beech,
That gave its gold with open hand,
And all its branches, toning chill,
Did seem to shut their teeth right fast,
To shriek more mercilessly shrill,
And match the fierceness of the blast.
But heard I a slow swell that noised
of far-off ocean, I was 'ware
Of pines upon their wide roots poised,
Whom never madness in the air
Can draw to more than loftier stress
Of mournfulness, not mournfulness,
Not mournfulness, but Joy's excess,
That singing, on the lap of Sorrow faints;
And Peace as in the hearts of saints
Who chant unto the Lord their God;
Deep Peace below upon the muffled sod,
The stillness of the sea's unswaying floor."

True criticism needs must note "Who chant unto the Lord their God" as an expression foreign to its context - too facile for the plane of feeling where it is introduced - yet to say this is after all but to pay a tribute to Meredith's work, to apply to it that standard of spiritual reality which is his gift to us and our literature.

There are many misprints in the volume. And, when we wonder, is an edition of Meredith's works to appear which shall clear so much of the accusation of obscurity from his fame - obscurity due so largely to the mistaken and misleading punctuation of the present editions?

M. STURGE HENDERSON."

(From The Athenaeum, March 5, 1910, pp. 270-271. The review is anonymous, and attempts a study of Meredith's early qualities as poet as witnessed in the light of their later development.)

"It happens not unfrequently that a poet's earliest efforts have little or no obvious connexion with the work by which he is afterwards

to/

to be known. Yet it must always be interesting to trace out the resemblances, however faint they may be, and that not only as an exercise in criticism, but also as an approach to a point of vantage from which a fruitful view of the poet's mature work is available - the point, in fact, from which he regarded it himself. For the mind that produced the later works came to them with the instincts of the earlier unquenched, and to discover why some things are similar may take us far towards discovering why other things are changed, and enable us to see the significance of the changes.

Two qualities conspicuous in the first part of this volume - the 'Poems written in Early Youth' - are altogether foreign to Meredith the poet as we have since learnt to know him - exuberance and facility. In describing Richard Feverel's love-carnival Meredith remarks on the limitless capacity that young hero manifested for pouring forth his soul in verse. Something about these early poems of his own suggests to us that they are chosen jewels, and that the pile from which they were chosen may have been very large. Whether that is the case or not, the diversity of styles shown in them and the absence of a complete success in any style are suggestive traits. Susceptibility, fertility, intellect, and determination were the qualities with which Meredith opened his poetic career. A natural instinct for the music and the lofty tone of poetry - the essential instinct of the poet, which, if it is to appear at all, can only appear as an intimately personal attribute - was almost entirely lacking in him, and though most of his verses are still generally recognizable as his, they would be recognised in almost every case by their faults. Such natural shoots of poetic instinct as are contained in them were destined to be cut away by a relentless knife, while a new stock was budded upon the wild bursting stem.

Meredith's genius, as expressed in his poetry, seems, in fact, to have reared and established itself by a gradual welding of powers that were at first independent or even at variance with one another, and by deliberate rejection of much that a lesser man would have regarded as his poetic birthright. The impulse to didacticism, for example, is conspicuous in this volume; and hardly less conspicuous

is an impetuous abandonment to sensuous rapture comparable only with Swinburne's. In one poem Apollo pursues Daphne through some twenty torrential pages of description; in another two Wordsworthian blackbirds teach unselfishness. In Meredith's mature work the raptures are dismissed; the didacticism is retained, and becomes in its developed form a dominant note. Accuracy in observation of nature, again, is a feature which leaves its mark on almost every page of these early poems; and combined with it the natural, many would say the essentially artistic, impulse to express fiery or meditative, languorous or sportive moods, appears prominently. Later we find the moods severely disciplined, the accuracy so intensified as to be one of the most salient marks of the poet's genius.

Nor are traits wanting to suggest that, had this self-discipline been less uncompromising and constrained, his poetic achievement might have been nearer perfection. A charming series of meditative pieces, which, as they were originally printed, included the first version of 'Love in the Valley', is grouped under the heading 'Pastorals'; and in these, more than anywhere else in the volume, the germ of future growth is to be looked for. It is probably more than a coincidence that in one of them the inspiring determination of the poet's life is recorded poetically. It might appear bold to claim Blake as a modelling influence, were not his cadences to be heard on many other pages - more frequently, indeed, than those of any other poet; here certainly we have Meredith, the swordsman of our poetic literature, walking humbly with the poet of the lamb:-

"Lo! as a tree, whose wintry twigs
 Drink in the sun with fibrous joy,
 And down into its dampest roots
 Thrills quickened with the draught of life,
 I wake unto the dawn, and leave my griefs to drowse.

I rise and drink the fresh sweet air!
 Each draught a future bud of spring;
 Each glance of blue a birth of green;
 I will not mimic yonder oak
 That dallies with dead leaves ev'n while the primrose peeps!

But full of these warm-whispering beams,
 Like Memnon in his mother's eye, -
 Aurora! when the statue stone
 Moaned soft to her pathetic touch, -
 My soul shall own its parent in the founts of day!

And ever in the recurring light,
 True to the primal joy of dawn,
 Forget its barren griefs; and eye
 Like aspens in the faintest breeze,
 Turn all its silver sides and tremble into song."

Youthful production though it is, the poem has a singularly mellow atmosphere; indeed, the shy bloom of young things could hardly have been preserved more beautifully; the very words have a tentative quality about them, so sensitive as to be almost tremulous. This atmosphere and its equivalents - often (who will deny it?) missed by Meredith in his prime - was it, one wonders, a necessity to sacrifice them in order that the moral determination should survive?

A further trait which ought not to pass unnoticed is the appearance in these earliest verses of the leading contours of the nature-world afterwards to be explored more minutely. The South-West Wind gives theme to a noble descriptive study; and the longest of the 'Pastorals', with its weighted and stumbling hexameters, has hardly a line in it that does not recall some feature of the lyric love-scenes of 'Richard Feverel' or 'Sandra Belloni'. Already, too, we find the tendency to take a single attribute of bird or tree and harp upon it. In Meredith's later work the nightjar is always on the pine, and the woodpecker skimming from tree to tree with a low laugh; in the poems of his early youth the nightingale sings passionately during the period of courtship, but relapses into dovelike tones when it has a mate and a nest. The moral is a little strained, and the poet's press readers have failed to understand it. The line

"But instead of to woo thou hast learnt to coo"

was mistaken in the edition of 1851 for a statement that the nightingale had ceased to hoot like an owl, and the slip is still uncorrected.

It is a trifling slip, and might even evoke sympathy, were it not typical of what seems to be becoming an habitual carelessness in the treatment of the text of Meredith's verse. The text of the present issue appears to have been founded on that of the Library Edition which was published by Messrs. Constable about a dozen years ago. Here was an opportunity to correct the misprints for which that edition was conspicuous, but these misprints are repeated, and their

number added to. It is difficult to bring errors home convincingly, owing to the fact that the Library Edition included amendments, presumably from the hand of the author, which were, like those of Wordsworth, not always based on a fine appreciation of the poetic purpose of the original. The following is a crucial example:-

"I was 'ware
Of pines upon their wide roots poised,
Whom never madness in the air
Can draw to more than loftier stress
Of mournfulness not mournfulness,
Not mournfulness, but joy's excess,
That singing on the lap of sorrow faints:"

Here, for the second "not mournfulness" we read "for melancholy", an unsympathetic stroke, injurious to the cadence of the succeeding line. But the fact that such strokes exist and have to be allowed for makes accuracy more imperative. Here is another passage from the same poem:-

"A star has nodded through
The depths of the flying blue.
Time only to plant the light
Of a memory in the blindness.
But time to show me the sight
Of my life through the curtain of night.
Shining a moment, and mixed
With the onward-hurrying stream,
Whose pressure is darkness to me,
Behind the curtain, fixed,
Beams with endless beam
That star on the changing sea!"

We print the punctuation of the original edition. In the edition of 1898 and in that now before us we find a semicolon substituted for the comma at "me", and a full-stop for the concluding exclamation mark. It is a different, and unmistakably inferior, reading of the passage. Had it Meredith's authority or not? It is conceivable that it may have had, just as it is conceivable that in his 'Song. Spring' he may have changed

"And orchard blossoms, white and red,
Breathe Spring delight and Autumn gain,"

into

"Breathe Spring delight for Autumn gain,"

as though the pleasure of Spring was that one's mouth was watering after apples. But it is not easy to believe that in the second line of 'Love in the Valley',

"Couch'd with her arms behind her little head,"

he should have changed "couch'd" into "crouch'd"; or in the 101st line of the 'Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn',

Hear the crushing of the leaves: hear the cracking of the bough!" changed "cracking" into "crackling". The present text is our only authority for these readings.

Complaint never ceases as to the obscurity of Meredith's poetry. Can treatment of this kind conduce to clearness? In the revised edition of 'Modern Love', published 1895, a marvellous piece of imagery,

"The great carouse
Knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door,"

was destroyed by the absurd inversion "knocks upon hard", a misprint which a critic of repute objected to under the idea that it was one of the poet's corrections. New issues of the poems will continue to be required, and it will be deplorable if each one adds to the existing confusion. Apart from misprints, Meredith's poetry can never be really intelligible until the punctuation of it is regularized. Is it not time for a complete recension of the text by some competent scholar, who can inform the public once and for all what Meredith intended and what he did not intend to write?

In addition to misprints already mentioned we note the following: p.90, "slopes down to the meadows" for "slopes down the meadows" (98); p.137 "redbreast" for "red breast"; p.155, "dreary" for "dreary" (98); p.177, "there's here no pride" for "there's there" (98); p.201, "Benguine" for "Beguine" (98); p.212, "seen" for "seem" (new). The figures in parentheses refer to the edition of 1898."

(From The Saturday Review, March 12, 1910 pp.334-335.
This review is entitled "Meredith's Poetic Promise".)

"The poems in this volume are mainly Meredith's very early work. More than half of them are taken from the volume published in 1851. Of the remainder most appeared with "Modern Love" in its first edition, while a few belong to later years - one, "To a Friend visiting America", to 1867, and a poem on the death of Robert Browning to 1889. These later pieces are in no way the best or most interesting, and they serve chiefly to confuse the character of the book. Apart

from them - or even including them - this poetry is attractive, worth studying for its promise and preparation. There is, for example, an early and shorter form of "Love in the Valley", already full of beautiful things in substance and in movement, but not beautiful as a whole nor to be regarded as such. This, "Daphne", "London by Lamplight", "The South-West Wind", "The Shipwreck of Idomeneus", "The Meeting", and "Autumn Even Song", contain probably the best work; and of these "Daphne" is by far the finest. Both the good and less good are seldom without some captivating touch from that robust, amorous and joyful spirit. When Meredith was at his best he combined sensuousness with a vigour both manly and intellectual in a manner which no other English lyric poet has equalled, except William Morris. His early work has glimpses of this combination. It was already strong in the man himself, but in his writing it is obscured by a rather unusual fault in a young man - the superabundance of his material from natural observation. This observation is good in itself, and even here, out of its place, is often pleasing and always interesting as a personal if not a poetic quality. It is all the easier to excuse because it is only the untrained exuberance of the very quality which makes "Daphne", for example, so fine. He treats the myth of Daphne and Apollo with great voluptuousness, as Keats would have done, but with none of Keats' languor. It is altogether an open-air piece. The sun, and no pale remembered orb, and the wind itself sweeten and brace the voluptuousness. We see and feel the events of the poem in full sunlight and on the rich solid earth, nor any shadowy substitute from a poetic underworld. It is like the work of Rubens, yet delicate too. And what gives it the singular quality is the interaction of English landscape and this sensitive but vigorous mind. We scarcely dare to quote from the poem. For it consists of nearly a hundred short stanzas, and movement and continuity are the soul of it, which quotation would destroy. Also, the poem is not free from the roughness of diction which shows up in a few lines. At no time did Meredith become sure of a style which was equivalent to, as well as suggestive of,

the/

the effect desired. For example, in "the South-West Wind in the Woodland " we are given an impression which few will ever wish to go back to the words in order to regain, and when we quote the following we do so reluctantly because its original effect is still so much bigger in our mind than the words now appear:

"For lo, beneath those ragged clouds
That skirt the opening west, a stream
Of yellow light and windy flame
Spreads lengthening southward, and the sky
Begins to gloom, and o'er the ground
A moan of coming blasts creeps low
And rustles in the crisping grass;
Till suddenly with mighty arms
Outspread, that reach the horizon round,
The great South-West drives o'er the earth,
And loosens all his roaring robes
Behind him, over heath and moor.
He comes upon the neck of night,
Like one that leapt a fiery steed
Whose keen black haunches quivering shine
With eagerness and haste"

But already in these early poems Meredith's treatment of Nature is distinctly his own, and not Tennyson's or Wordsworth's. In the manner in which he allows himself to be seen sharing the emotions of Nature he bears some resemblance to Byron, but his personality and his Nature are more subtle than Byron's. He does not stop at Wordsworth's "One impulse from a vernal wood", but seeing a sordid London crowd exclaims:

"Could I but give them one clear day
Of this delicious loving May,
Release their souls from anguish dark,
And stand them underneath the lark;-
I think that Nature would have power
To graft again her blighted flower
Upon the broken stem, renew
Some portion of its early hue."

Probably he changed this opinion. Nevertheless Nature and Meredith will continue to inspire and console, and the alliance between the two, between a splendid human being and the beauty of wild earth, is a wonderful thing to see here, whether in the philosophy, in the descriptions, or in the love poetry of "Love in the Valley" and the seventh "Pastoral".

THE POETICAL WORKS

OF

GEORGE MEREDITH,

Complete in One Volume,

With some notes by G. M. Trevelyan.

1912.

Reviews:

- The Daily Chronicle, October 15, 1912, p. 4 by Edward Clodd.
- * The Athenaeum, October 26, 1912, p. 474.
- The Review of Reviews, November, 1912, pp. 583-4.
- The Daily News, November 4, 1912, p. 8, by Lascelles Abercrombie.
- The Scotsman, November 4, 1912, p. 2.
- The Pall Mall Gazette, November 21, 1912, p. 10, by E.T.
- * The Cape Times, November 22, 1912, p. 11.
- * The Nation, November 23, 1912, pp. 359-60.
- The Cambridge Review, November 28, 1912, p. 150.
- The Bookman, December 1912, pp. 152-9 by Alice Meynell.
- The Sunday Times, December 1, 1912, p. 6.
- * The Spectator Literary Supplement, December 7, 1912, pp. 931-2.
- The Publishers' Circular, Christmas Number, 1912, p. 28.
- The Observer, January 12, 1913, p. 5.

THE POETICAL WORKS.

1912.

(This notice appeared in The Athenaeum of October 26, 1912 (page 474). It is interesting for its mention of Meredith's "host of admirers".)

"Give me my seven-and-sixpenny", said Tennyson when he wanted to read out some of his poems. A complete edition in one volume is, after all, the most convenient for general use, and a host of admirers will welcome this compact edition of Meredith's verse. It surpasses its fellows in containing notes which explain mythological and historical allusions, and the subject or sense in a few cases where it may be obscure. These notes are put at the end of the volume, so as not to worry those who do not need them, but they are worth consulting, as they embody records and memories of conversations with Meredith himself.'

(From the Cape Times, Friday, November 22, 1912 page 11. It appeared in the section 'The Library Table' under the title 'Meredith's Collected Poems'.)

"Meredith, in one of his poems, compares a certain critic to the "nose fly-teased in its noon's nap". The figure is most apt to picture the condition of any serious reader who approaches these poems in the hope of understanding them. There are so many brilliant phrases that allure one with the hope of catching the poet's meaning as a whole; but the moment we hope to put our finger on the elusive fly of his train of thought, lo! it is gone again.

There are exceptions to this general rule, and the exceptions occur more frequently the further one goes back to the beginning of his poetic work. Meredith might have become a popular poet if he had always written as he wrote in the little poem opening thus:

"When April with her wild blue eye
Comes dancing o'er the grass,
And all the crimson buds so shy
Peep out to see her pass;
As lightly she looses her showery locks
And flutters her rainy wings."

But the friend and admirer who edits this first complete collection of Meredith's poems finds it necessary to add nearly 40 pages of short notes, most of which are designed to elucidate the

subject/

subject-matter of the poems. The editor had the privilege of frequently discussing these matters with the poet during his lifetime, and yet he is compelled to avow on occasion that some passages (not a few) defy explanation. Those who have not enjoyed the editor's privilege will look for notes on these notes.

But if Meredith is obscure, he certainly has much to say in his contortionist way. His teaching in ethics and religion is more dogmatic in poetry than it is in the prose of his novels. Nature here in her varying moods is the goddess who reveals directly the answer to all manner of doubt and difficulty; so much so that when we find ourselves suddenly confronted with a strayed "she" or "he" we know that Mother Earth is meant. In "A Trial of Faith", which he wrote on the May morning that his wife lay dying, he comforts himself in this central object of his faith:

"Granite the thought to stay,
That she is a thing alive
To the living, the fallen, the strewn.
But the questions, the broods that haunt
Sensation insurgent, may drive,
The way of the channelling mole,
Head in a ground-vault gaunt
As your telescope's skeleton moon."

Where Francis Thompson felt himself pursued down all the loveliest paths of Nature's realm by the unwearying love of a Personal God, Meredith refused to see any love which did not end in the blind alley of an optimistic temperament. These are

"Chords to the Nature without,
Orbs to the greater whole."

The finest expression of this worship of Nature is found in the majestic "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn", "and ho, for a night of Pagan glee!" Some verses written 11 years before show that this subject had been long in his mind. The technique of his art is perfect, as he draws on all the resources of changing metre to symbolise the rushing of the autumn wind through the woods.

"And the waltering alleys overflow
With musical shrieks and wind-wedded hair."

But in all this exuberant life he will not see more than his eyes and ears can discern:

"Great/

"Great Mother Nature! teach me, like thee
 To kiss the season and shun regrets.
 And am I more than the mother who bore,
 Mock me not with thy harmony."

Prayer in such a scheme of things has no intercessory power; it is merely the throb of Nature through the human soul; he prays to the star Sirius in the long watches of the night. The vision that he sees when the stars are alive with frost "waken waves of thought that burst to foam". This transient froth on the billows of man's musings upon Earth's sublimities is the highest conception of prayer to which he can rise. The great mystics, even when they were not poets in form, rose to a more daring flight than this.

In Meredith's spiritual world the genius of sweetness and light is the comic spirit which presides over the fortunes of men, and spreads the antidote to pessimism with "thunders of laughter, clearing air and heart". Poor old Empedocles, as the classical example in terrorem, is shown to us in a brief poem: "the last of him was heels in air". But he was not the worst specimen of the lack of the same comic spirit. The gods of Olympus, in an "Ode to the Comic Spirit", are little better than Empedocles.

At least, this is what his editor tells us. For no man that ever spoke the English Language could have found this meaning for himself. The editor got it from the poet, and we happily have it from the editor. But when we compare the poem with Mr. Trevelyan's clear and logical exposition of it, we feel as if, with all this in his mind, Meredith had gone to the telegraphy office and sent off his ideas in a metrical "wire" to a friend. Brevity is secured at all costs; articles, conjunctions, relatives, even necessary nouns are sometimes dispensed with. By a merciful dispensation of Providence, Mr. Trevelyan has acted as if he were the receiver of the telegram in the secrets of the sender; and thus one of the poet's most daring if most obscure, works was saved.

Nearly every prose work that he wrote has some reference to the comic spirit, so one may presume that the reader will approach the poem with some idea of the subject of it. But all his former teaching is fitly capped with the scene here described. Momus

(the comic spirit with an old heathen name) in revenge for being cast out of heaven, leads a procession of broken-down gods along the seashore for the delectation of "trippers". Never did mortals hear such music, as the Olympic band parades the sands, each god with his wheezy instrument. The poet cheers on their leader thus:

"Head on,
Sword of the many, light of the few! untwist
Or cut our tangles till fair space is won
Beyond a briared wood of austere brow,
Relieved of discord by thy timely word
At intervals refreshing life : for thou
Art verily keeper of the Muse's key".

Which pageant is an allegory; and appears to mean that every heart needs chastening, and can only be brought into harmony with the sum of things by such wholesome castigations as the "sword of common-sense" can give. Mixed metaphors! you will say; but that is just the way of Meredith. If you do not like it, then go to some more condescending singer. He will not bend to oblige you, if your object is to get at the secret of his philosophy of life.

But if you only wish to be amused, he can unbend. The meditation of the "Old Chartist" on the brown water-rat links nature and politics in a droll fashion:

"I never found as true a democrat.
Base occupation
Can't rob of your own esteem, old rat!
I'll preach you to the British nation."

If ever Meredith finds his way into the popular anthologies, it will be through some of his short lyrics or ballads. There is a sprightly tenderness in many of these that is not due to their form alone. The song to his dog is a call to the hills,

"Here among men we're like the deer
That yonder is our prey;
So, over the hills we'll bound old hound,
Over the hills and away."

In the song called "Violets" written in 1851, and in the "Song of the Songless", written in 1901, we have two delicate inspirations separated by half a century. The latter is as perfect as it is short, and can be set down in its entirety:

They/

"They have no song, the sedges dry,
 And still they sing.
 It is within my breast they sing,
 As I pass by. *
 Within my breast they touch a string,
 They wake a sigh,
 There is but sound of sedges dry;
 In me they sing."

It would, however, be flattery to say that Meredith is tune-ful habitually. He sacrifices, in his more serious poems, music and beauty of structure to his thought. Ideas are so packed into the mould, and figures of speech are so crowded upon one another, that occasionally he comes near to being incoherent. Moods of nature are dove-tailed into moods of the soul, without warning and without explanation; and strange asides are heard, and we can barely guess whence the cries come.

In short the philosopher too often overwhelms the bard. May we not call him a poetic pragmatist? He will not be bound by mere rules of grammar or mechanical processes of logic. It is the intuition that matters (i.e., his own thought), the form profits not; which is a little hard on the reader who can only learn the thought through the form. Hence the result of it all is a little disconcerting. If, apart from the traditional explanations of Mr. Trevelyan, a committee of ten poets were to sit upon the meaning of the longer and more recondite of Meredith's poems, it is safe to say that we should have ten separate poems for every one that the author of the Comic Spirit wrote. Some of his great qualities we have touched upon, it would require a volume to touch upon them all; but when they have been added together, we may say in his own words : yet

"Beauty's Queen some other way is wed". "

(From The Nation, November 23, 1912 pages 359-360.
 The review is entitled "A Young Man's Poet".)

" The middle-aged usually suppose that to be "young" means to have the same taste and enthusiasms they had once themselves. This is rash, anyone may soon discover, by reviving his own youthful admirations in the presence of his juniors. To be young in one generation is certainly not the same thing as being young in another.

Yet youth has certain tendencies in common; it has its own predicaments and susceptibilities, and to these the poetry of Meredith must appeal, so long as his ideas have not fallen too far behind the times.

Perhaps this has already happened: the writer does not know; but fifteen, ten, years ago Meredith's poems meant much to the then young generation; his ideas were inspiring to them. It is from the point of view of those who were indubitably young at the very end of the nineteenth century that this review of the latest and completest edition of his poems is written.

What a covetable possession this book would have been! In the first place, it has been annotated in the most judicious manner by Mr. George Trevelyan (it is no easy task to be so brief, clear, and pointful in notes); and, in the second, the book contains nearly every poem Meredith has written. The satisfaction of possessing the complete works of a favorite author was adequately, if unsympathetically, expressed by Lord Melbourne, when he exclaimed, on hearing of the death of Crabbe: "I am always glad when one of these fellows die, for then I know I have the whole of him on my shelves". Those who deplore the inclusion in such editions of inferior work which the author himself condemned, are more often wrong than right; they are certainly wrong when the poet has wind enough in his sails to carry extra ballast. But complete editions are not for everybody. They are for close admirers, who have caught the infection of the writer's spiritual interests, not for those who do not know him yet; and they are certainly not for critics.

It is not true that the most ethereal, the most ecstatic, the most idyllic poets appeal more to youth than those who find their beauty in less radiant realities. This may have been the case with some young generations; but it has certainly not been the case with all, nor is it natural that it should always be so. Meredith is a poet likely to appeal to many in each young generation for contrary reasons. The young are inevitably much preoccupied with two subjects - with love and with philosophy. It is absolutely necessary for them to get some conception of their relation to
the/

the universe, and also some idea of what can be made of their own passions. Questioning and venturing, no doubt, resolve at last into a more or less passive process of getting used to life, and passions and desires accommodated or snuffed out; but as long as any condition worthy to be called youth persists, so long is hope alive in everyone - rebellious or wistful, as the case may be - that there are magnificent stakes to be played for in life, and that something admirable, not to say astonishing, can be made out of that mixed stuff each feels himself to be. It follows, therefore, that a didactic poet who can invest his judgments with beauty appeals first and foremost to the young; not necessarily to the artists among them (those whose impulse is to create beauty will find in beauty already created their best inspiration, whether it is associated with thought or not), but to the majority of each fresh generation. The interpretations of such a poet, and the values he affixes to emotions, must suit the times; but granted they do, by combining the roles of thinker and artist, he will probably kindle most auditors among the young. What matter if he is difficult! To get at his meaning, they will read and re-read poems which to less ardent curiosity seem desperately indigestible; they will bring a jenny and dark-lantern to his obscurest passages; nor will the swiftest allusion seem too elusive to one who has caught the gleam of a revelation across a page - hints will suffice him -

"Show him a mouse's tail, and he will guess,
With metaphysic swiftness, at the mouse."

Meredith has found such readers by the hundred, and in their ears the assertions of critics that "he is not of the centre", that the elucidation of his poems is as tedious to the mind as oakum-picking to the fingers; that they are written in shorthand, if not in downright cipher, sound like the mumblings of Struldbruggs, or the peevish petitions of the Mr. Woodhouses of literature, for a smoother and warmer gruel.

His themes are precisely the matters most urgent to them - how to make the most of this extraordinary agglomeration of feelings called being in love; how some kind of reconciliation between

Nature's/

Nature's beauty and her laws can be reached and maintained; how, penned in by practical circumstances, room can be found for youth's herd of passions, hopes, and desires - a problem which soon presses, raising dismay only paralleled, perhaps, by Noah's feelings while watching the procession of beasts wind slowly towards the limited accommodation of the Ark; and, lastly, how to learn to face the fact that the best things do not last, without losing faith either in them or in life itself.

This last theme was one upon which Meredith was never tired of enlarging. He loved his own poem, "The Day of the Daughter of Hades", because it taught, in picture and story, that even a day upon earth was good, and the beauty of earth only the more significant to one who, like Skiagenia herself, must return to darkness. Death and destruction, the Scriptures say, have heard the sound of wisdom with their ears; it was Meredith's theme that only he who has been close up to them can catch the music of energy and joy that rolls through all creation. He is essentially a religious poet, and a religious poet who appeals especially to those who, having no definite religion, feel most uncomfortable when they are pressed to affirm anything about the nature of the universe or the soul, and yet whose deepest instinct it is to be loyal to life. "God is not in his Heaven (indeed, that is the last place where a God whom I could worship would be); but all is right with the world..... No; perhaps not all - but enough. It is enough; it is enough." Some such words express the creed or no-creed of those to whom Meredith is a most satisfying poet. How sustaining he is in great calamities, the writer does not know; he should suspect he did not satisfy; chiefly because it is, above all, the mood of triumph that he was born to express. Only when you had struggled up out of the dark defile would he meet you again; then there is hardly a poet whose greeting would be more radiant and inspiriting. He is the poet of courage; but of the kind of courage which is inseparable from hope.

When one comes to think of his work as a whole - prose as well as poetry - courage seems his favorite virtue. It is the

quality he relishes so immensely in his amazing and often preposterous aristocrats; it is what he praised above tenderness and self-sacrifice, to the astonishment of the Victorian world, in women. His laughter, even, is rather the shout of a victor over squeamishness and vanity than the laughter of a humorist. Vanity, which he often calls egotism, he detested, because it was incompatible with passion as he conceived it must be to be worthy of the muse. Love must be noble strength on fire, or he flew at it and tore it to pieces. As an amorist (and no greater has written in prose), he detested the elements which most commonly and insidiously corrupt the passion he believed in - vanity and sentimentality. It is against sentimental egotism in relation to Nature, and to the whole order of the world as science reveals it, that most of his didactic verse is directed. His attitude towards Nature is one of acceptance; so far, it is religious; but, in his case, acceptance is not founded upon belief that if man understood, he would see that Nature satisfied his desires -

"He may entreat, aspire,
He may despair, and she will never heed.
She drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need,
Not his desire."

When the history of Victorian literature comes to be written (hitherto we have only had attempts), one point will surely be brought out : that Meredith was the first poet to assimilate into his poetic conception of the world the idea that death and battle is the law under which all living things exist and come to their proper perfection. By poetic assimilation, one means that the beauty which the poet understood and expressed is based upon that law. Other poets, Tennyson, for example - glanced at the conclusions of biologists; but, for their inspiration, they turned away to Pre-Darwinian conceptions of the order of Nature. Meredith was the first poet whose sense of beauty sprang directly from the contemplation of Nature as "red in tooth and claw", and from an acceptance, not only of man's mortality, but of the passing of all good things. His poetry is a paean of affirmation in the face of these facts. In one of his letters, when he was near upon eighty, he wrote: "I can imagine that I shall retain my laugh in Death's ear, for that

is what our Maker prizes in men." Fifty-four years before he had written:

"Great Mother Nature! teach me like thee
To kiss the season and shun regrets.
And am I more than the mother who bore,
Mock me not with thy harmony!
Teach me to blot regrets
Great Mother! me inspire
With faith that forward sets
But feeds the living fire,
Faith that never frets
For vagueness in the form.
In life, O keep me warm!
For what is human grief?
And what do men desire?
Teach me to feel myself the tree,
And not the withered leaf.
Fixed am I and await the dark to be.
And O, green bounteous Earth!
Bacchante Mother! stern to those
Who live not in thy heart of mirth;
Death shall I shrink from, loving thee?
Into the breast that gives the rose,
Shall I with shuddering fall?"

That passage from "The Spirit of Earth in Autumn" expresses the philosophy which was the life-breath of Meredith's poetry. It shows that it contained a religious affirmation. Those lines "Teach me to feel myself the tree" (to identify my will and desires with yours), "and not the withered leaf" (not to judge life by the failure of my own hopes and desires, doomed inevitably), are the essence of religious emotion. And once Meredith had embraced this faith, vague enough in form, he kept his ear alert for every message, giving a clue to practical conduct, his interpreting imagination might divine in Nature. It is this part of his work which is perishable stuff. In those poems he becomes too much the schoolmaster abroad, bent on tagging instruction and exhortation to every scene and incident. A thrush tapping a snail, a night of frost in May, a cutting wind, everything he perceives turns to homily. We may welcome this when we are young and prodigiously interested in the improvement of our own characters; but it is the insight of the poet rather than the hearty confidence of the moralist which, in the long run, affects us most. The moralist in Meredith has often cramped his receptivity; he is often insufficiently passive in attitude towards what he describes, to write his best. There is a monotony of strenuous passion in his work. His aim is often to strike some spark out of objects which might kindle a useful fire of enthusiasm rather than

to exhibit their beauty. But it is not for those on whom such sparks have fallen, even though they only lit a blaze of straw, to gird at him for that. Setting aside the didactic element in his work, he has illuminated unnoticed beauties and written memorable things which we can quote -

"For proof that there, among earth's dumb,
A soul has passed and said our best."

To return to what is the theme of this restricted commentary upon Meredith's poetry. He is a poet for the young. His delight in physical vigor, his laughter which is a sudden glory, his pre-occupation with the question: How fine characters are made? his praise of courage, his abounding hope, his respect for thought, his delight in health, and the unfailing seriousness with which he treats the passion of love, make him youth's poet. His very difficulty makes his verse companionable; his hard sayings are good to ruminate, and as satisfying as a crust of good bread on a long day's walk. Meredith makes a welcome third when two friends travel on foot together. His thought breeds discussion; they can unpack his phrases together; he suits the tramping mood; his words bring Nature nearer and companions closer. It is in the light of such memories this review is written, when

"To either then an untold tale
Was Life, and author, hero, we;
The chapters holding peaks to scale,
Of depths to fathom, made out glee;
For we were armed of inner fires,
Unbled in us the ripe desires;
And Passion rolled a quiet sea,
Whereon was Love the phantom sail." "

(From the Literary Supplement of The Spectator, London, December 7th 1912 page 931-932.)

MEREDITH'S POEMS.

"Criticism of Meredith's poetry turns upon the question whether his mind found a freer and more complete expression in poetry or in prose. Qualities necessary to a great prose-writer are quite different from and often incompatible with those necessary to a poet. At its best, prose tends to rival poetry, to usurp its functions, to become dramatic, and to substitute its own music, the rhythm of accumulated periods for the rhythm of repeated

measures. In spite of this tendency it remains a cooler, a more logical, and a more intellectual medium; and, putting aside all technical distinctions, there is a functional difference, though a difference of degree rather than of kind, which is that poetry expresses the intensity and the delicacy of emotion with a greater force and a finer accuracy than are ever attained by prose. It is, simply, an instrument of a finer sensibility and of a wider range. In his novels Meredith is a master of romance, of comedy, and of satire, that is sufficiently obvious; but with it all there is a delicate probing of spiritual emotion, a revelation of quick and elusive moods; and these two characteristics, the instinct for comedy and the quick, intuitive sympathy, are never completely reconciled in his work, where the place of intellect is taken by an extraordinary subtlety. They were not reconciled, but they might both be presented together in an atmosphere of romance, and as romance it is inimitable. It is a romantic style, overlaid with a multiplicity of detail, and the details themselves very curiously described, refined upon, and played with as the mere toys of an elaborate artifice. He understood, perhaps better than any man of his time, the unstable and irrational element in character; he can represent for us, with a minute fidelity, the reaction of emotional forces to external influences, the swift and variable lights upon wood and valley reflected, as it were, in the quick caprice of human moods. It is where heat is white, at the inner edge of the flame, where the ideal meets with only a sufficient amount of reality for it to consume, that his finest effects are gained. There he leaves it, and reality he considers only in its comic significance. Tragedy implies too great an effort of will for him to meddle with it. So much reality as his ideals may consume he allows, since it does not disturb the romantic atmosphere; so much, that is to say, as we may expect to find in women, and nature, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His heroes are boys, Crossjay Patterne, Richard Feverel, and Harry Richmond. Gower Woodseer and Vernon Whitford represent his idealization of the masculine element, and he does not seem to have suspected their essential comedy. His

best/

best portraits of mature men are to be found among his secondary characters, those whom he only touches superficially, as Squire Beltham, or those who are frankly comic. "Modern Love" itself is a comedy, and it is in that strange sequence of sonnets, which are not sonnets, that the opposition of the comic element and of the emotional element is most marked. We see the two elements opposed and separate more clearly in this sequence, because within the narrow limits imposed by the form there is little room for romanticism. The vanity and egoism of the husband are heightened by the ironical device of making him the speaker, so that his pettiness and emptiness are revealed to us by his own words. He is simply an amateur of emotions, posturing and simpering to impress not only the world but himself. When he interrupts her conversation with her lover in the wood, he says:-

"I moved
Toward her and made proffer of my arm".

And then

"I felt the pained speech coming and declared
My firm belief in her, ere she could speak."

This is Sir Willoughby Patterne's magnanimity; but, lest we should take this to be the author's own point of view, he tells us, when he appears to speak the epilogue, that "these two were rapid falcons in a snare". The chief interest of the poems is in no way connected with the subject. The wife, perhaps, moves our sympathy, but what moves us most are the glimpses of natural beauty, the swallows gathering in the sky, "the largeness of the evening earth", isolated poems such as that which begins, "Am I failing? For no longer can I cast", or "They say that Pity in Love's service dwells". As a whole, it is the most realistic and the least successful of his novels.

If we say that Meredith's claim to rank as an English poet should not be based upon such work as "Modern Love," we can with greater safety extend the principle already applied to it, to such poems as "The Young Princess" and "Archduchess Anne," which are frankly romantic. If any of Meredith's work in this kind is placed beside Browning's, the colour and life depart from it, because Meredith is never sufficiently/

sufficiently direct in his vision of reality. Moreover, we do not suppose that even the most hardened Meredithian will find much to praise in the poems which Mr. Trevelyan has grouped together under the title "Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History." The fact that when we look forward to our fate we see it to be largely dependent upon chance, should deter us from attributing a rational coherence to events in the past; and the poems seem poor to us because they are based upon formulas and not upon facts; they do not ring true. The advice in the "Lines to a friend visiting America", is every bit as undignified as the English attitude towards America censured in it, and "Trafalgar Day" does not quicken our pulses. Meredith's genius, for us at least, is not expressed in any of these pieces or in any similar work.

Where it is expressed completely and with an undeniable originality is in "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth." The spirit of these and of similar poems in "A Reading of Earth" is without kindred. Wordsworth considers nature as a mystic; his Lucretian vision pierces ultimately through the shows of things to a stark and awful reality. Coleridge, on the contrary, has always a touch of sensuousness; his vision seeks not so much an ideal as an attenuated and ethereal beauty. Meredith does not look upon earth from either point of view; his intellect, his spiritual nature, even his senses seem to be merged in some profounder and more primitive form of consciousness. He interprets earth to us, not as an individual mind separated and differentiated from the objects of his consciousness, but simply as the sum of that consciousness itself. It is his emotional nature, free and pure, which feels the wonder of earth. He does not show us the wind in the leaves, he makes us feel it; his interpretation is not to the eye or to the ear alone, but to all the senses at once, and in the attempt to present these different qualities simultaneously he breaks the instrument of language in his hands. Of course it is sensuousness, as the green light between the corn-stems in Coleridge is sensuousness, and, of course too, the appeal to the senses is not made, and could not be made simultaneously. But the effect upon us, if we

surrender ourselves to the magic, is apparently immediate, and scarcely sensuous, because it seems in some way to have lost its objectivity, or our own senses appear to have been extended into the objects we perceive, so that we do not differentiate ourselves from them. We have no right to complain of the means when the object is attained; and we have no right to scrutinize the details separately, when the effect is derived from a rapid accumulation of detail, when the method, that is to say, aims at a cumulative effect. But it may be profitable to examine the following lines:-

"He saw through the leaves
The Mother and Daughter meet.
They stood by the chariot-wheel
Embraced, very tall, most like
Fellow-poplars, wind-taken, that reel
Down their shivering columns and strike
Head to head, crossing throats : and apart
For the feast of the look they drew."

The idea barely moves in those eight lines; instead of a single impression we have a number of diverse impressions, and in proportion as the whole is split up the effect is weakened; but the effect of the detail to the poet is of more importance than the idea upon which the detail is strung. The notion of subordinating the detail to the idea, and the parts to the whole, is wholly alien to his romantic and Celtic temperament. The detail to him is everything : "the feast of the look", "exulting to tears", "She smiled like Sleep on its flood"; for such an extraordinary delicacy of phrase we are willing to forgive occasional conceits, as with reference to the curse of Demeter,

"Recollected of this glad isle
Still quaking."

Some may urge, very plausibly, against this restriction of Meredith's genius to the emotional interpretation of nature, the claims of "The Nuptials of Attila" and "King Harald's Trance"; but we are inclined to consider these as the tours de force of a virtuoso. They are too theatrical. We have no room to speak of his metrical technique. It is curious to note his use of old folk-dance measures in "Love in the Valley" and "Phoebus with Admetus," measures scarcely strong enough to bear his compressed style. He is not to our ear a musical poet; and we can scarcely believe that the qualities which we have praised in him will have the same value for posterity as they appear to have for us.

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